To Fr. Maynard x Cloud

Rev. Jerome Bielejeski
St. Cloud. Minn

# LITTLE SERMONS ON THE CATECHISM

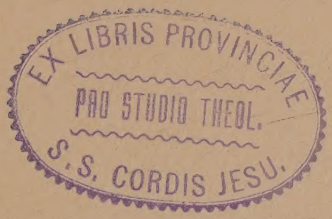
FROM THE ITALIAN OF

COSIMO CORSI

CARDINAL ARCHBISHOP OF PISA

WITHDRAWN

VOLUME II

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# A COMPLETE COURSE

OF

# Instructions in Christian Doctrine

## I. The Necessity of Religion

There is a God. This is a truth engraved by Providence upon the human heart and only the fool, as Holy Writ expresses it, has the temerity to say there is no God. And since there is a God, there must be a true religion that teaches us how to know Him, to love, serve and worship Him. This inference is so simple and so obvious that it needs no proof. This true religion, so indispensably necessary for mankind, can only be the one revealed by God. Man, by his own unaided intelligence, cannot know the divine Will if God does not vouchsafe to reveal it to us. God is truth, and there can be only one true religious teaching of the divine truth as revealed by God to men, and this true religion is found in the holy Catholic Church, which Jesus Christ Himself has founded upon earth, to be the infallible teacher of divine truth.

Let us briefly consider the necessity of religion, the chief obligations which religion imposes upon us, and the means of fulfilling these obligations or religious duties.

Religion means the knowledge and worship of God and the practice of our duties toward Him. We shall give our attention now to the obligations which religion imposes upon us, the faithful exercise of which renders us truly religious and makes of us good Christians.

The chief obligations of religion are: the worship of God which entails the loving of Him; the detestation of offenses against Him; the return of thanks for benefits received and petition for graces needed. The fulfillment of these obligations is the duty of mankind, it is demanded by both the majesty of the Creator and by our own needs.

The first of religious duties is the worship of God. The word worship means not only the adoration of God, it includes all kinds of homage due to God, in particular, obedience to His laws and submission to the dispensations of His divine Providence.

You know, dear brethren, that God is an eternal, infinitely perfect, spirit, the Creator of the universe. He has given us body, soul and everything we possess. All creatures, each in its way, acknowledge God as the supreme Lord, they announce and proclaim the glory of God (Ps. xviii, 1). Is it, indeed, necessary to prove then that man also should pay homage to God? Should not man, realizing these facts, feel impelled to cry out: "O my God, my Creator, my Lord." The necessity of religion is proved, therefore, by the first obligation which it imposes upon us, the obligation to worship the Creator, to submit ourselves to Him with our whole being, as to our Maker, our God, our Supreme Lord.

In order to correspond to this first duty, to worship the infinitely perfect God in a proper manner, our hearts in particular must pay homage to Him by love and affection. What is all the beauty of created things compared to the beauty and magnificence of God? God's goodness and forbearance alone make Him worthy of our entire love. He has heaped upon us countless blessings. Yes, indeed, heaven and earth and all creatures cry out to us unceasingly that God loves us, that He has created all things for us (Ps. xviii, 1). And now I ask you: Should not men feel in duty bound to

love so good a God? Only a blinded soul, a hardened heart, would not feel drawn to love God. And religion by making this love an obligation proves its reasonableness and necessity.

This great, just and holy God, this magnanimous and benevolent Master, must rightly expect most complete and perfect submission in His creatures, and also the burning desire to please Him, to correspond to His holy will. And this is exactly what religion imposes upon us as our duty.

The blessings received from God not only oblige us to love Him, but impose upon us likewise the sacred duty of gratitude. Hence, again the necessity of religion, which demands us to be grateful to God for His manifold blessings.

And though God has granted us many blessings, our needs have not yet all be satisfied. There remains the need of more benefits. That which we possess we may lose at any moment. We have wants for the future. All things, all means of assistance are in His hand. He can grant or refuse His assistance, as it pleases Him. He has the right to place conditions upon His graces in order that we may humbly sue for them. By insisting that we have recourse to Him, He impresses upon us a wholesome consciousness of our weakness, of our helplessness. He compels us to remember Him, to make ourselves worthy of His blessings. Considering our own impotence, what benevolence, what love, it is on the part of God to listen to the petitions of His creatures, to grant them more the more they ask, as it were: to reward them abundantly even for addressing their petitions to Him. Dear brethren, from whichever point of view we may consider the love of God we shall find it beyond our understanding.

Not only the needs of this present life oblige us to seek God's help: infinitely greater are the graces which He reserves for us. To

attain these we must implore Him more especially and perseveringly. And herein consists another duty of religion, and at the same time a new proof of the necessity of religion.

All things proclaim this necessity to us, everything impresses this truth upon us. Yes, religion is truly a necessity and the most important of our duties consists in fulfilling the obligations which it imposes upon us. All peoples, even the most ignorant and barbarous, whatever their errors regarding the nature of the worship of God, they all are imbued with its necessity, they all practise some kind of worship. The duties prescribed by religion are, therefore, reasonable, just and indispensable, and punishment must necessarily be meted out to those who disregard these sacred obligations.

Apart from spiritual and eternal benefits gained by a faithful compliance with the duties of our religion, there are great advantages gained from it even for this temporal life. Religion is the firmest and safest foundation of human society. It prescribes the love of our neighbor; urges fair and square dealing among men, it is the most powerful support of the law, it restrains even the secret crime which law cannot prevent, nor discover and punish.

Religion teaches us to avoid evil and practise good, it procures for us peace of conscience, consoles us in afflictions, strengthens us in contradictions, and unites us with our fellow-men through the bond of charity.

Let us, therefore, be faithful to the precepts of our holy religion that is given to us by God to make us happy now and for all eternity, and let us make the firm resolution to faithfully preserve it in our hearts. Let us seek to the best of our ability, especially by good example, to induce others to be good Christians. Let us scorn the cry of the corrupt and impious, who, openly or covertly, ridicule and vilify religion and religious practises. Let us endeavor espe-

cially to keep godless people, godless literature, out of our homes, out of the reach of those given to our care.

A truly religious heart and mind is one of the most precious possessions a man can wish himself in this life. Take care to preserve it if you are so fortunate as to own this possession, and strive diligently to acquire it, if you are not yet the happy owner. All the riches and possessions of the world will not avail you in the end if this one thing is wanting in you. Amen.

## II. The Presumption of Those Who Would Be Saved Without Merit

"Yea, the hour cometh, that whoever killeth you will think that he doth a service to God" (John xvi, 2). So did Jesus warn His disciples. It is difficult to believe that man's perversity could go so far. And yet all this happened. To oppress the innocent, to persecute the just, to put them in chains and bondage, to slay them, to do all these cruel and brutal deeds in the name of religion, such is the story told by the annals of the oppressors of Christendom. And in malice these ungodly people are even surpassed right in the heart of Christianity. The Roman soldiery imagined that in persecuting the young Church they were zealous for God's glory and defended the respect due to the law; but Christians who maliciously and intentionally offend God have no excuse for their perversity. Nor have they any excuse who neglect their religious duties and yet expect to be saved, who after a life spent in indifference and sin expect to enter heaven without merit, even burdened with guilt.

Certain heretics have dared to assert that faith alone, without good works, suffices for salvation; that it is necessary only to believe firmly that divine mercy will forgive all sins. According to this teaching men might live entirely to suit their moods and evil inclinations without fear of chastisement by God. This false doctrine, so convenient for those who desire to satisfy their passions, finds too many adherents. Alas, how greatly they deceive themselves!

Holy Scripture explicitly condemns in many passages such accursed teachings. "Faith without work is dead," says James the Apostle (James ii, 26). And St. Peter confirms this by assuring

us that good works obtain for us eternal salvation (II. Pet. iii, 2). St. Paul warns that without charity, namely, the fulfilment of the commandments, faith avails us nothing, and he frequently impresses upon us the exercise of good works (Cor. xiii, 5-8), and the Gospel teaches that before God's judgment seat reward and punishment will be meted out according to the good or evil works which we have performed (Matt. xxi, 2).

St. Augustine declares that he cannot understand how so many Christians can abandon themselves to sin and hope to escape eternal damnation just because they belong to the Catholic Church. They do not consider, he says, that Jesus Christ, the eternal and infallible Truth, teaches that many are called and few are chosen. David, while inviting us to confide in God and to hope in His boundless mercy, exhorts us, nevertheless, to perform good works (Ps. xxxvi, 3).

Human actions, in order to use an expression of the Apostle, are like so many grains of seed, the fruits of which we shall reap at our life's end (Gal. vi, 8). Alas, the harvest will be sad for those who expect to be saved without merits. Those who sow the seeds of sin will reap corruption and death; the fruits of God's kingdom will only be gathered by those who, as faithful disciples of Christ, sow the seeds of good works, by a pure and truly Christian life.

St. Gregory tells us that if the glory and splendor of the recompense of the just is desired by us, the labor in the Lord's service must not be shunned, for the crown of justice is promised only to those who have faithfully and courageously fought the good fight (*Homil. 27 in Evang. in init.*). But to live in sin and yet hope to die in grace is a grievous presumption, says St. Bernard, and will incur everlasting curse.

Therefore, the presumption of expecting to be saved without

good deeds is reckoned amongst the sins against the Holy Ghost, because it is a sin of peculiar malice, openly and directly opposed to the true Source of all good. God's clemency is not separated from His justice, and His justice is not distinct from His Goodness. Hence, it follows that those who, blinded by presumptuous confidence, misuse the divine mercy are most certainly on the road to perdition. God will be compelled to punish them because He is just.

Let us, therefore, beware of this presumptuous confidence, and, armed with the wholesome fear of God, let us strive to perform good works, by faithful observance of the divine law, zeal in prayer, frequent reception of the holy Sacraments, love of our neighbor, detestation of sin, holy confidence in divine mercy and firm hope in attaining with God's grace everlasting bliss.

Divine justice will put to confusion proud souls, it will humble and punish those who, though not doing good works, and even heaping sin upon sin, yet foolishly expect that they will obtain eternal salvation. It is true eternal glory is offered by God to all of us, and Jesus Christ has purchased the salvation of all of us by His Blood; yet we shall hope for it in vain if we do not endeavor to merit salvation by cooperating with God's grace, by a faithful performance of our duties and obligations. Amen.

## III. The Desire for Everlasting Happiness

The angelic teacher, St. Thomas, in his writings, makes mention of the fact that the desire for happiness is inborn in man, and that happiness of eternal duration alone can satisfy the human heart. The vision of God, in which eternal happiness consists, will make the human heart so supremely happy that David expected the gratification of all his longings through it (Ps. xvi, 15). St. Peter, one of the witnesses of the transfiguration of our Lord upon Mount Thabor, was by a glimpse of the eternal glory so entranced that he longed to remain there and enjoy forever the magnificent sight (Matt. xvii, 4).

The desire for the happiness of heaven helps to free us from undue attachment to the vanities of the world, and the true longing for true celestial happiness gives us even in this world a sweet foretaste of it.

The desire for heavenly things engenders in us a disregard for earthly possessions. King David, the absolute lord of Palestine, then the most beautiful and fertile country of the earth, loved by his subjects, respected and feared by other nations, favored with everything that man's heart could desire, was not contented with his lot, he sighed for rest in God, for the true happiness which not by any chance could be taken from him (Ps. xli, 1).

Our divine Redeemer endeavored to impress us with the necessity of the desire for eternal bliss. He exhorted us not to be over solicitous for our earthly wellbeing, but to seek above all things the kingdom of God; indeed, He included in the prayer which He taught us to address to God the petition, "Thy kingdom come."

And so we see how kings and princes have exchanged the royal purple for the garments of the monk; gifted and wealthy persons abandoned honors and luxury to take refuge in the forests and pass their days in severe works of penance. Virgins of talent and beauty, with all prospects for a happy future in the social life, have forsaken the allurements of the world and sought their salvation in the humble convent cell. Imbued with the desire to enjoy God in His glory, they understand with the apostle that worldly honors and wealth are vanity and folly (Philip iii, 8).

One of the most glorious examples of such holy souls is found in the heroic behavior of the mother of the Maccabees. She exhorted her sons to persevere in refusing the offer which the emperor made to tempt them to betray their faith, and witnessed their martyrdom with truly sublime steadfastness, and she encouraged her boys by pointing out to them the glorious reward which awaited them in heaven (Macc. vii, 20).

Dear brethren, it behooves us to examine our hearts and ascertain whether we have the sincere and proper desire for the things of God, for eternal happiness. Remember that we are not created for this world, not placed in it to satisfy the desires of the flesh, but that we are created to enjoy God eternally in His glory. The vanities of the world, deceiving and of brief duration, are not capable of satisfying the human heart, whereas the longing for the kingdom of God enables us to gain merit in our earthly exile, and to insure our eternal happiness.

Visible things, says the Apostle, are created for the purpose that through them we may be reminded of the perfections and beauty of the Creator, and the Holy Spirit tells us, in the Book of Wisdom, that the consideration of the beauty of created things should inflame our longing for the vision of God, the source of all beauty (Wis.

xiii, 3). Creation is a feeble intimation of the goodness and greatness of the Almighty, who called it into existence: "The light of thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us," sings the Psalmist. How short-sighted are those who would only enjoy created things without uplifting their gaze and desire to the Creator, the supreme and eternal good, the only object really worth wishing for.

When the pleasures of this world allure you by their seductive charms, when the world, the passions, the devil seek to win you, ask yourselves the question: What shall I gain by it in the end? If I give way to this inclination, if I do not avoid this company, if I commit this injustice, if I satisfy this passion, what will be the end of it all? On the other hand, God calls me to His service, He requires the sacrifice of my heart, He demands the observance of His law. If I serve Him faithfully, if I do penance for my errors, if I listen to His word, receive the Sacraments, what will I gain? And after comparing the answers to these two questions can we still remain undecided as to which side to choose? Truly it is an easy choice.

Let us desire, therefore, the things of God, let us sigh for the possession and enjoyment of His peace. Let us remember that a crown is waiting for those who serve Him faithfully, who love Him with all their hearts. He who loves God lives happily even in this world, and will finally enter into the enjoyment of that happiness, that unspeakable bliss, which God has prepared for His faithful servants. Amen.

## IV. The Word of God

In reading the history of the nations, one of the safest indications of the morality or depravity of a certain period is found in the appreciation, or lack of it, manifested toward the word of God. Experience teaches that godlessness and immorality accompany indifference and aversion for the word of God and its preacher. Whenever there have been troublous times for the Church, they have always been heralded and accompanied by this unholy condition. Where the pulpits are forsaken there impiety and license reign supreme. We can see this fact verified in our own days. Much of this unfortunate indifference among Christians is due to the fact that the sermon, the catechetical instruction, have been shunned. Many of those who live in vice and sin would have been protected against their shameful degradation, had they devoutly listened to the word of God, and they might yet be saved if they would listen to it. Thus we see the words of the Lord confirmed: "Man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God" (Matt. iv, 4). The divine word is the way, the truth and the life (John xiv, 6). Without it there is darkness, error, ruin.

It will, therefore, be profitable to give our thought to the great importance of the word of God, and to contemplate its necessity for eternal salvation.

Faith is the foundation of Christian justice, without faith it is impossible to please God and to be saved (Heb. xi, 6). The virtue of faith, though supernatural and infused by God, is by the dispensation of divine Providence awakened in us by listening to the word

of God (Rom. x, 17). The Apostle Paul writes to the Romans: "Faith then cometh by hearing; and hearing by the word of Christ." If then faith is necessary to salvation, the word of God, which engenders and nourishes faith in us, is also necessary to the same end. In Holy Scripture we find many examples of the importance and necessity of the spoken word of God. God often spoke to the patriarchs and the just of the Old Testament, either directly or through angels and prophets.

In the beginning the Divine Word called the universe into existence and since then it has been calling men from error to truth, to the life of grace. We read in the Gospel that Christ commanded the apostles to preach the Divine Word to all the nations. And as the human body cannot live without food, so can the soul not retain spiritual life without the nourishment of the word of God.

Since this truth is absolutely undeniable what shall we say of Christians who avoid hearing the word of God? "He that is of God heareth the words of God. Therefore, you hear them not, because you are not of God" (John viii, 47).

The sinner who willingly listens to the Divine Word has reason to hope for conversion and eternal salvation. What would have been the fate of David had he refused to listen to the prophet? Would his adultery and murder have been forgiven? If Magdalen had avoided the preaching of the Son of God, would she have given up her evil life? Instances of conversion due to the hearing of the word of God are numberless.

The word of God has for its purpose not only the enlightenment of the understanding but also the exciting of the will to do good. It is not enough to learn God's teachings, we must also live in accordance with them. It is necessary, therefore, to listen to the word of God in a manner to derive profit therefrom.

It is a common thing that those who listen attentively to a sermon fully appreciate all that is said, but fail to realize that their own state of conscience is concerned. They often think of someone who might be deserving of the preacher's censure, but never apply the words to their own case.

If we would only think more of our own faults than the faults of others! Let us remember that we are sufficiently taxed with the task of saving our own souls, and let others take care of theirs, unless, of course, the spiritual welfare of others is given to our care.

I exhort you, therefore, to listen to the word of God, without which the soul cannot have spiritual life, without which it is dead for the life of grace. Remember, it is not the priest, but God who speaks to you through the priest. And after you have heard the word of God, preserve it in your hearts. Suit your actions to what you have heard, remembering the words of the apostle: "For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified" (Rom. xi, 13). Only thus may we confidently hope for the blissful recompense which the Gospel promises to those who truly love the word of God (Luke xi, 28). Amen.

## V. The Duty of Professing Our Faith Before Men

Faith is necessary in order that we may be accepted by God as His children and as heirs of His Kingdom. And this faith should not be allowed to remain shut up within us, inefficient and unfruitful. To believe in our hearts and make profession with our lips are according to St. Paul (Rom. x, 10) equal obligations. As we must confess our faith before God so are we also in duty bound to manifest it before the world.

This testimony we owe both to God and to men, but above all to God, because He is thereby honored and glorified. To God we owe homage both interior and exterior. A purely interior faith without expressed profession cannot be pleasing to God. And we owe this profession also to men, because in our intercourse with one another we must give edification by good example; furthermore, we must seek to become united in the same faith, and all this cannot take place unless exterior manifestation is given to our faith and its teachings.

In this regard many Christians are wanting. They carry the faith in their hearts, but they are not loyal to it in practice and exterior profession. Rare are nowadays those stanch Christians who show their faith by word and deed. But many there are who from weakness, timidity, or cowardice, try to conceal their membership in the Catholic Church. They would be disciples of Christ, but in secret; in their outward behavior they are friends of the world, they follow the indifferent and infidel throng, and yet it is impossible to do both at the same time without injury to the faith.

The precept to profess the faith contains both positive and negative obligations. It forbids us to say and to do that which amounts to a denial of the faith; it commands us to make known our faith in speech and action. There are various ways of denying the faith, of committing the grave sin of apostasy. One may deny the faith, by propagating doctrines and principles that are in opposition to the faith. Unfortunately there are some Christians who, moved by vanity to pass as enlightened, to draw the attention of others, to make themselves conspicuous, do not hesitate to sin in this respect. Thus we may hear Catholics advocate the principle that we should pass the few days of our earthly life in the pursuit of pleasure; or, that great solicitude for the affairs of our soul is not requisite; or, that one need not think so much of the hereafter: that no person has ever come back from the other world to tell what goes on there, and such like talk. Again, some have the habit of ridiculing sacred things, of making fun of devout persons, of speaking disrespectfully of Priests and Religious, of smiling foolishly when the reward and punishment of the next life are subjects of discussion. Such behavior has the earmarks of unbelief and practically amounts to denial of the faith.

We may deny our faith not alone by words, but also by actions, as St. Paul (Tit. i, 16) tells us. Those who abandon themselves publicly to an indifferent and sinful life make themselves guilty of apostasy, of falling away from the faith. As long as sin is not yielded to without opposition it is, though condemnable, to be ascribed to human frailty, which, with Divine assistance, may be overcome. But when sin becomes the rule of life of a person it is nothing less than a falling away from the faith. When such a person sets aside all propriety, all fear of God, he admits that he has no faith, no religion, no fear and no love of God.

Faith is denied, furthermore, by pretending to have another faith than the one to which one actually belongs. This would be the case of one who joins in the practices and ceremonies of another sect.

Finally, the faith is denied by concealing and keeping it a secret in places, and upon occasions, where it must be regarded as a denial. If you hear people in your presence make remarks derogatory to your faith, and you keep silent when you have reason to suppose that your silence will be accepted as an approval of such remarks, then you sin against the precept to confess your faith. In such cases the failure to profess the faith is nothing else but a denial of the faith, because the indifference with which a person listens to slanderous remarks against his Church and his faith manifests a disinclination to adhere to the teachings of that faith.

But, you may object, by contradiction we would only excite such vilifiers to worse outbreaks against the faith. This is often only an idle excuse. It is not a question of entering into a quarrel, it is simply your duty to make it understood that such topics are distasteful to you and that you do not wish to share in these discussions. A few words often suffice to silence a slanderous tongue. In any event, you can show by your demeanor that such conversation is displeasing to you. Turn your back upon those who talk thus and keep out of their society. If there were not so much weakness and cowardice among Christians, godlessness and impiety would not put on so bold a front, and could not be preached almost without opposition as it is in our days. If you really have a living faith you will confess it and be willing to defend that faith before those who attack it.

So much for the prohibition, let us turn now to the command to confess our faith.

The obligation of openly confessing our faith exists whenever we are directly asked about it. In such cases we are obliged openly to profess our faith without circumlocution, even at the peril of our lives, as did the early Christians. Other occasions are not lacking in which we are obliged to confess our faith: when, for instance, the honor of God or our neighbor's welfare requires it. And such occasions present themselves often. There are many who mock at the doctrines and principles of the Gospel. We must declare ourselves openly in such cases as already remarked. If we fail to do this we shall be regarded as unbelievers and others will feel themselves fortified in their impiety. Speak, therefore, when necessity requires it, speak with prudence and without anger, but speak frankly. A Christian who fears that worldlings and freethinkers may look upon him with contempt because he manifests zeal for his religion, is a poor specimen of a Christian. I say the faith must be confessed when there is *necessity*. It is plain that you would make yourselves very much disliked, and would do more harm than good, if you would try and regale your neighbors at all times with your religious opinions. But though we are only under certain conditions obliged to profess our faith in words, we must at all times give evidences of the same in our actions. Our lives must correspond with the principles of our faith, so that we may be recognized as loyal adherents of the holy Religion which we profess. Of what avail would be our loud protestation of the faith if we denied it by our actions? We must so live, that, as the Gospel says, all may see our good works, and glorify our Father who is in Heaven (Matt. v, 16).

Brethren, a time will come, and this time is not far off perhaps, when we shall find ourselves given up by the world, anxiously expecting the judgment of God and the sentence that will decide our

destiny for all eternity. What will that sentence be? You may answer: Who can tell? But I say to you: Every one of us can tell. If we take to heart in this life the interests of our faith and of our holy Religion, which are indeed the interests of Christ Himself, by showing at all times and everywhere in word and in deed that we are true Christians, then we shall at that moment be recognized by Jesus Christ as His true disciples, and He will invite us to enter into the glory of His Kingdom. If, on the contrary, we are now ashamed to profess the standard of Christ, if we let ourselves be influenced by others and fail in this duty, what other fate may we expect than to be rejected by Christ. He states this plainly in His words: "Whosoever, therefore, shall confess men before me, I will also confess him before my Father, who is in Heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, I will also deny him before my Father, who is in Heaven (Matt. x, 32, 33).

## VI. Our Duty to Seek the Glory of God

A dutiful child is not contented with giving his own love to his father, he desires that he be also honored and loved by others.

Since we act thus toward an earthly father, how much more should we be solicitous for the honor and glory of the heavenly Father. We should, therefore, feel in duty bound to seek His honor in all things. The Apostle exhorts us to do all things for the glory of God (I. Cor. x, 31). Our divine Redeemer Himself here on earth sought not His own honor and glorification. He declared Himself solicitous only for the honor of this heavenly Father (John viii, 29, 49, 50). He showed us with what zeal we also should seek the honor and glory of God. Without this intention all our actions will be fruitless; indeed, rather than gaining eternal happiness, they would deserve the wrath of divine justice.

To God belong all honor and all glory, because He is goodness and perfection itself. The Apostle says that to God alone is due all honor and glory and he confesses that he cannot understand how man, a mere nothing, can esteem himself as anything.

If we are able, so the Apostle says, to do all things with the aid of God's powerful assistance (Philip iv, 13), that does not give us the right to exalt ourselves, it rather proves the necessity of giving to God the honor that is His due. Our divine Redeemer taught His apostles what they must do in order to please God and to fulfil faithfully the duties of their apostolate. He prescribed for them: Perseverance in prayer, a blameless life, simplicity, patient endurance of ignominy and offenses, mutual brotherly love, self-

denial, contempt of earthly goods, meekness, persistence in trials, and zeal and solicitude for the salvation of souls. And the Lord concludes: "When you have done everything whatsoever I have commanded you, then you can say only that you are unprofitable servants who simply have done their duty, inasmuch as the Lord is surely not obliged to thank His servants for having obeyed His Commands."

Since we have nothing of ourselves, and have received life and knowledge, strength and will, from the benevolent Dispenser of all good, we can only say with the Apostle: "But for myself I will glory nothing, but in my infirmities" (II. Cor. xii, 5). But if we give to the Almighty the glory that is due Him, He promises us His goodness and graciousness in superabundance, for our own exaltation and glorification. "Whosoever shall glorify Me, him will I glorify," He said. In all our actions, therefore, we must seek the glory of God and consider His honor; in all conditions of life we must do all things for the glory of God, as the Apostle bids us (I. Cor. x, 31). Indeed, Jesus Christ commanded us to pray for the glorification of the Divine Name (Matt. iv, 9). And it is indeed right and proper to seek before everything else the glory of Him, from whom, as the source of all goodness, we expect all that we need and desire.

Contemplate the heroes of Christendom, to what end did they keep night vigils, why did they fast so rigorously, why devote their lives to the instruction of the ignorant and conversion of sinners? Why did they abandon their fortunes, and devote their lives to prayer and penitence? Was it in order to make their names famous; to earn the admiration and applause of the world? Ask a St. Philip Neri, a St. Francis of Sales, a St. Vincent of Paul, a St. Ignatius of Loyola, or any of the innumerable other saints, and they will reply that they worked solely for the greater glory of God.

Good works are useless and absolutely without merit, if those who practise them seek the praise and esteem of men, instead of seeking the honor and glory of God. To put our own glory above that of God, must incur the displeasure and punishment the Lord and creator of the universe.

Listen to a striking proof of this truth from holy Scripture. The Acts of the Apostles relate that Herod Agrippa died a miserable death, being eaten up by worms (Acts. xii, 23). And the crime for which he incurred this terrible punishment was none other than that of not giving due honor to the Lord. He made a public oration one day arrayed in royal garments, and spoke with such eloquence that his auditors cried out with one acclaim: "It is the voice of God, and not of man" (*Ibid.* v., 22). This praise filled him with great pride and vanity and he refused to give glory to God as was His due. For this sin he was striken by God's judgment (*Ibid.* v, 23).

If we do not have the intention of honoring God in all our actions we shall have lost our time. All our efforts, our labors, our good deeds will be uselessly squandered. They will gain nothing but chastisement. If we, on the contrary, in all our actions seek the greater glory of God, we shall attain to that blessed peace that never ends. Make it a habit, therefore, dear brethren, of offering all your doings to the Lord. Say often during your occupations: My God, all to thy glory. Offer up all your actions to God, and intend in everything you do His greater glory and honor. Thus you will make all your own actions meritorious, and you will render yourselves worthy of receiving the crown prepared in heaven for those who faithfully serve the Lord. Amen.

## VII. The Vanity of Created Things

Greatly are they to be pitied who pursue the vanities of the world, instead of seeking God in the light of faith. Deceived by satan's suggestions they do not appreciate the fact that they must die, and that an endless eternity awaits them, an eternity either of supreme happiness with God, or of wretched misery with the damned. The pleasures and honors which the world promises to its followers attract man's heart; they appear so honorable, profitable, and enjoyable, that they incite powerfully the desire of man and cause him to neglect the only true good, his God. "How long," cries the Psalmist, "how long ye children of men will you remain hard of heart? Why do you love vanity and think lies?" Let us take thought and become wiser. God, who was our beginning, must also be our end, and only in Him can we find true happiness. The things of this world are of brief duration, and if we love them to excess, they will surely lead us to perdition for all eternity.

The Apostle tells us, that as man is created in order to enjoy God eternally, he must live in this world as if he enjoyed it not: he must use this world only as far as is necessary for his maintenance during his brief pilgrimage. Hence we ought to content ourselves with the necessaries of life and not be solicitous for glory which vanishes as smoke, for riches which bring unrest and not contentment, for sensual pleasures that excite, but do not satisfy (I. Tim. vi, 8).

King Solomon well understood this truth. When the Lord directed him to ask for what he desired, he asked for wisdom to

rule his people justly. He stated that he desired not riches, but that he might possess that which was necessary to life (Prov. xxx, 3). But God in His magnanimity decided to give Solomon also that which he had not asked for, namely wealth and honor, and he became the greatest monarch that ever lived upon earth (III. Kings iii, 14). One would suppose that Solomon when provided by God with so much earthly good could have wished no better fate. Listen, however, to his own words: "I said in my heart: I will go and abound with delights, and enjoy the good things which Providence has vouchsafed me. I made me great works, I erected proud palaces; I planted vineyards, I made gardens and orchards, and set them with trees of all kinds. I had a household of slaves, men-servants and maid-servants; and herds of oxen and great flocks of sheep, above all that were before me in Jerusalem. I heaped together for myself silver and gold, and made me therefrom precious vessels for my table. I had singing men and singing women about me for my delight—and whatsoever my eyes desired, I refused them not: and I withheld not my heart from enjoying every pleasure and delighting itself. But finally I found in all these things only vanity, disappointment, lies and vexations of spirit" (Eccles. ii, 1).

It is a fact that all the treasures of this world suffice not to satisfy the desire of the avaricious; the sum total of earthly honors is incapable of gratifying the ambitious; no amount of sensual pleasures will appease the craving of the unchaste; and no degree of love by creatures is capable of bringing peace to the heart or mind, until it dwells in God, our last end and aim. The goods of this world have a deceiving appearance, a false luster which confuses man's intellect. Those who, in order to enjoy all these created things, renounce the spiritual and eternal treasures that God has prepared for His faithful servants, may be likened to a man who scorns

genuine gold and jewels and strives his utmost for the possession of counterfeit money and sham jewelry.

The treasures of this world are not only deceiving in appearance, their duration is brief and their enjoyment fleeting. Hence the Psalmist compares those attached to their possession to persons who in their dreams imagine they are rich, but who perceive upon awaking that they are as poor as before (Ps. lxxv, 6). Our divine Saviour has rendered this truth very evident to us by the parable of the rich man in the Gospel, who, having made a rich harvest, wanted to build greater barns for his crops so that he might say to himself: "My soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thy rest, eat, drink and be of good cheer." Alas, scarcely had he lulled himself to a sense of security with his vain thoughts, when he heard the voice of God calling: "Thou fool, this night do they require thy soul of thee" (Luke xii, 20). Our own experience convinces us plainly of the vanity of earthly things. Often we see persons most favored by fortune become in a short while the plaything of misfortune.

We see how quickly the destinies of men change, how smiles give way to tears and sadness, how human joys so often end in suffering and sorrow.

St. Luke relates how the rich glutton, who clothed himself in purple and fine linen and gave magnificent dinners, had no compassion for the wretched Lazarus: but when he died his grave was in hell (Luke xvi, 22). Lazarus, on the contrary, who had in his life been poor and helpless, was conducted by angels to Abraham's bosom. "For," as the Apostle says, "they who would become rich, fall into satan's snare, and into many unprofitable and hurtful desires, which immerse men in desttruction and perdition" (I. Tim. vi, 9).

Dear brethren, let us take heed and learn from these examples

the necessity and wisdom of being faithful in God's service, then all our proper desires shall be fulfilled.

Let the lovers of the world do as they please, disappointment shall be their share, if not during life then in the awful last moments when death is hovering over them. Then they will perceive how unwise and foolish they have been, in pursuing the vanities of the world, exerting themselves for empty appearances. They will be appalled at the extreme misery in which they find themselves, and of them will come true these words from the Book of Wisdom: "What hath pride profited us: or what advantage hath the boasting of riches brought us? Wo to us. Our beloved earthly happiness has vanished like a shadow" (Wis. v, 8). But the just man may in his last hour be confident that the peace which he has enjoyed in the Lord's service will not cease but be transformed into eternal rest and heavenly bliss.

Let us, therefore, earnestly resist the seductive charms of the world, which as St. John tells us, is full of deceit, lying and cheating (I. John v, 19). Let us love God with our whole hearts, serve Him with fidelity, and we shall enjoy true happiness. Let us ever keep before our minds the warning words of the Lord: "What doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Matt. xvi, 26). Amen.

## VIII. Christmas Day

To-day the mysterious star of Jacob has risen: the Virgin has given the Redeemer to mankind, the whole universe resounds with the jubilant hymns of the Heavenly Spirits. And the Church invites us to rejoice in the Lord, because salvation and peace have appeared amongst us. She calls upon us to contemplate this mystery of love, and she desires that the circumstances of this mystery shall serve as our rule of conduct and that they may become for us the source of salvation and everlasting bliss.

To this end let us review the story of the birth of the Saviour, to draw therefrom lessons of the highest importance. "In those days," so the Gospel narrates, "there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that the whole world should be enrolled. All went to be enrolled, everyone into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, in order there to be enrolled with Mary his espoused wife, who through the operation of the Holy Ghost bore the Incarnate Word of God." The time appointed by Divine Providence to give to the world its Redeemer was at hand.

"And it came to pass," Holy Writ continues, "that when they were there, Mary's days were accomplished, that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him up in swaddling-clothes and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn."

On account of the extraordinary crowds that met in Bethlehem, and in consequence also, no doubt, of their extreme poverty, Mary

and Joseph had been unable to secure lodgings and found themselves shelterless. So they had arrived at a cave, where travelers with their beasts took refuge in unfavorable weather. A bare and chilly place, the only furnishings some straw and a homely crib. It afforded not much shelter against inclement weather. There the holy pair took refuge, glad to have found at least a roof under which to pass the night. And there the glorious mystery was accomplished that had been desired by the Patriarchs and foretold by the Prophets. Behold how the supreme Lord of the universe appears upon this earth. He might have manifested Himself as a powerful Prince, surrounded with glory and majesty, yet His palace is a stable, His throne a manger, His adornment cheap swaddling-clothes. Come you who are poor and lonely and behold the humble station which the King of Glory, the Lord of the Universe, has chosen for Himself: is it not more wretched than yours? May you complain of your lowly station, since it is the one that the Godman has selected for Himself. Come you also, who are proud and haughty, you lovers of luxury and pleasure, and tremble at sight of this deprivation and suffering of the Godman, who will judge you at the end of your luxurious life.

"And there were shepherds watching and keeping the night watches over their flock. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood by them: and brought them the tidings that the Saviour should be born in the city of David."

The mystery was scarcely accomplished, when it was immediately proclaimed. And to whom was the news first made known? To the princes of the world, to persons of prominence and high station? No, indeed, it was the plain working people, simple shepherds who dwelled with their flocks, whom God selected to be witnesses of this stupendous event. And the reason of this preference was their very

simplicity, their singleness of heart. God shows that He loves this singleness of heart; we must possess this virtue if we would please Him. Those shepherds fulfilled faithfully the duties of their laborious life far from the gaze of men, renouncing comfort and frivolous enjoyment, they watched over the flocks intrusted to them. Let us, like the shepherds, seek the Lord with singleness of purpose, by the steady exercise of the duties of our station, by vigilance over ourselves and over those committed to our care, by shunning sin and worldliness, and surely the Lord will make Himself known unto us as He made Himself known to the shepherds.

We read, further, how the shepherds upon hearing the message from the Angel, were seized with great fear. But the Angel said to them: "Fear not: for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, that shall be to all the people: For this day is born to you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord." And suddenly the shepherds saw a multitude of angels praising God, heard the joyous words: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will."

This was indeed joyful news which the Angel brought to the shepherds. Verily, what more important tidings has the earth ever heard. This newborn Babe brings with Him a new order of things. He opens the gates of heaven to men to whom it had been closed. By satisfying Divine Justice He brings down upon earth the dew of Divine mercy and grace. He abolishes the synagogue, destroys idol worship, and gives to the world a doctrine of faith and morals which completely renews it, uplifts it to a height hitherto unknown, and adorns it with the precious raiment of supernatural grace.

And may all men participate in this joy? Alas, no. It is the portion of those only who are of good will. Only to them did the angels proclaim the joys of heaven. If we are of good will, like

the shepherds, we shall be cheerfully obedient to the voice that calls us, and we shall not hesitate to follow holy inspiration. Let us go in spirit to the crib of the holy Child to learn there the all-important lesson which He teaches us. Let us learn of Him profound humility, contempt of the things of this world, the spirit of Christian mortification and perfect love of God and man. In this manner we shall fit ourselves to merit the blessed peace which He brought into this world, and His blessed birth shall be for us the pledge of eternal happiness. Amen.

## IX. On Final Impenitence

There is one death for the body but there is more than one for the soul. The soul dies the first time when man offends God by grievous sin. Divine charity being extinguished by sin, the sinner has no longer the spiritual life of sanctifying grace (I. John xii, 13). The second death of the soul, as Holy Writ calls it (Apoc. xxi, 8) is a far more terrible death than the first one, and takes place when the sinful soul is thrust into hell. Nothing is of avail once this death has taken place. The spiritual death during our earthly life, however, may be followed by a spiritual resurrection, if the sinful soul returns in penitence to God.

There are sinners who delay their repentance in the presumption that God will give them the grace of conversion before their death. Alas, many of them will be deceived: for, to live stubbornly in impenitence is anticipating the judgment of damnation.

There are three instances related in the Scriptures of dead persons being recalled to life by the Lord. It is noteworthy that the Lord proceeded differently in each case. In the instance of the daughter of the ruler of the synagogue who had just departed this life, the Saviour merely took her by the hand, and immediately she arose (Mat. ix, 25). The son of the widow of Naim had been dead some hours, and Jesus brought him back to life with more ceremony. He touched the bier, caused the bearers thereof to stand still, and, raising His voice, commanded the dead to arise (Luke vii, 14). Finally, in the case of Lazarus, who had been in the grave for four days, Jesus Christ used even more effort. He groaned in spirit

and troubled Himself saying: "Where have you laid him? And weeping He betook Himself to the tomb, had the stone rolled away, prayed to the heavenly Father, and then commanded the dead to come forth from the grave" (John xi, 34).

The holy Fathers remark that these instances are types of the soul dead to grace. The Son of God might have raised all three by a single act of His will. Yet He chose to perform these miraculous awakenings in different ways, in order to make plain to us that the degree of difficulty which the sinner encounters in his spiritual resurrection is in proportion to the state of his soul. One who, having lost the life of grace by the commission of sin, at once has recourse to God, rises easily from spiritual death. For those who live on for a while in their sins, it becomes more difficult to come forth from the grave of sin. Those, finally, who delay their conversion, and thus remain in spiritual death for a length of time, dead to grace, can only be saved by a very special outpouring of divine Mercy.

Nevertheless, it is a very common thing for obdurate sinners, impenitent though they be, to flatter themselves with the hope of dying a holy dealth. They say divine mercy is infinite. Jesus Christ, they claim, died upon the Cross for all men; the Lord did not create us in order to damn us; a single act of perfect contrition at the hour of death suffices in order to put us in possession of eternal glory.

These things are quite true, but it is no less true that the sinner who argues in this way has a very small chance of salvation. The mercy of God is infinite, it is true, but the justice of God is likewise infinite. These qualities are united in God to such a degree, that He never ceases to be just, though He is merciful, nor does He abandon His mercy when exercising His justice. He is now

dealing in mercy with the hardened sinner, He endures patiently the offences inflicted upon Him, He invites the sinner to be reconciled to Him, but the misuse of His great forbearance will compel Him to apply the rigor of His justice at the hour of the sinner's death, because there can be no greater affront to God than to persevere in wickedness because the Lord is merciful.

Jesus Christ died for all men, it is true, yet there are wicked men who will have none of the fruits of the Sacred Passion. St. Thomas tells us that the Redeemer's sufferings, although of themselves more than abundant for the salvation of all mankind, are only efficient for those to whom they are applied through the channels of faith, hope and charity and the holy Sacraments (3 P. q. 49-rt. 3 ad. 1.). Hence, it follows that impenitent sinners, who are not in the charity of God, are deprived of this grace.

God did not create us in order to damn us, this is true, it is His will, His desire, to make us all blessed. But for what purpose did He create us? Surely not to be disobedient to His will, not to refuse Him the honor and homage due Him. He created us that we should love and serve Him in this life, and after this life to enjoy Him eternally in heaven. What can be the destiny of those who live to offend Him, who refuse to keep His Commandments? They were created in order to be saved, no doubt, but they insist on being damned, because the just God must reward or punish each one according to his works (Ps. xlviii, 11).

Finally, we hear them say, a single act of charity, in the hour of death, suffices in order to obtain heavenly glory. But can it be reasonably expected that such people will have true contrition for their sins after having sought their pleasures in them all their lives? How will they be able, indeed, to detest sins, which they loved so well, to which they have been such slaves? It seems an

utterly impossible things. Theologians are unanimously of the opinion that it is if not quite impossible, still in the highest degree difficult, for the impenitent sinner to awaken true contrition at the end of his life (Sext. in 4 Sent. dist. 20, 22).

Brethren, if you have your conversion truly at heart, do not postpone it. The Lord offers you forgiveness if you return to Him with sincere contrition for your sins; but He has not offered to prolong your life until you have been converted! The longer sin remains in the soul, the more difficult it is to regain the life of grace, and if you persevere in impiety in the hope of a deathbed conversion, you take great chances of dying without contrition. Remember the threat of the Lord, that they who delay taking refuge in His mercy will seek it finally in vain, and will die in their sins (John vii, 31; viii, 21). May the Lord preserve us from such great misfortune. Amen.

## X. Guardian Angels

One of the most salutary devotions, and one of the most neglected, is the devotion to the angels, in particular to our guardian angels. The sanctity of these heavenly spirits, and the distinction which they enjoy with God, the important service which they have rendered and still render us, all these reasons bid us to practice devotion to the holy angels.

Let us, therefore, briefly recall to our minds what the angels are, what services they render us, and what our obligations are towards them.

You know that the angels are pure, created spirits. Their excellence surpasses any description that man can imagine or express. The being of the angels is something so vast and superior that man's understanding cannot fully conceive it. Their knowledge is immense. They know all nature, all things in heaven and on earth. Their power is great and their beauty surpassing anything we can imagine.

The occupation of the angels in heaven is to love God, to praise and glorify Him unceasingly. They are, as it were, attendants of the Heavenly Court, and the Ministers of God. Their number is legion, some theologians are of the opinion that there are millions of them. All these spirits are filled with a love of God, the greatness of which is incomprehensible to man. They are penetrated by the spirit of God, and their thoughts and inclinations are in complete accord with His. And since they see how God has infinite love for men, and how He humbled Himself for man's sake to crown him with blessedness, they too, burn with ardent love for men.

Although the holy angels are not alike among themselves in power and dignity, as God has divided them into different choirs and gave them various degrees of station, yet they all are, according to the testimony of St. Paul, "the ambassadors of God ordained to the service of those who await the inheritance of salvation." Thus some are sent by God for the protection of nations and cities, others there are for churches and altars, others for houses and families. Those who are most intimately associated with our own persons are our guardian angels, so-called because they are commissioned by divine Providence specially for our protection and defense.

That each one of us is given into the protection of an angel is a truth which is declared plainly in holy Scripture and is universally taught by theologians. This truth is calculated to show us once more the love of God, the dignity of our souls, the importance of our salvation and the respect that we owe to fellow men. God is not content with watching Himself over us unceasingly. He has even confided each of us to the protection of an angel, and commissioned him to take care of us. From the first moment of our existence this celestial guardian has been at our side, and will not forsake us as long as we live.

And in what consists this protection? It consists in those many services that these messengers from heaven can render us; they enlighten us, defend us, strengthen us and show us the way to eternal salvation. The guardian angels protect us against the many dangers to which we are exposed every day of our lives. Who, indeed, could number the perils that beset us in childhood, in youth, in middle age and old age; dangers threatened by the elements, dangers in traveling, dangers due to sickness and all kinds of untoward happenings. There is no one amongst us who has not

more than once in the course of life been in danger of life and limb. Who else has saved and protected us at such times but our good guardian angel who, as the Psalmist expresses it, bears us in his hands (Ps. xc, 12).

But as the guardian angel is given the task, above all, of watching over the salvation of our souls, so is their chief care and their special vigilance directed toward this end. With loving solicitude they endeavor to divert us from evil and induce us to do good. By warnings of conscience, by pious impulses, by enlightenment and holy incentive, by favorable conditions which they arrange, they are incessantly striving to attain their end. We can do nothing for the salvation of our soul without divine assistance, and this assistance, as St. Thomas says, is given us through the effort of the angel who is a mediator for us with God and the immediate dispenser of all graces. They defend us against temptations of the devil either by driving him away by virtue of the power given them, or by illuminating our souls in order to let us perceive the artful snares and cunning of the arch-fiend, and by inspiring our hearts with courage and strength to overcome them. And if it happens that we fall into sin, because we listened more willingly to the whisperings of the devil than to the pleadings of our guardian angel, still he does not depart from us on that account, nor leave us to our sad fate, but he turns to God in order to obtain for us time for repentance and the grace of conversion. Yes, indeed, the guardian angel has more than once averted well-deserved punishment from us by his prayers, and has striven in manifold ways to lead us back to God and to arouse us from the sleep of death. The invisible attendance of our guardian angel is for us a source of most special blessings, blessings of all kinds for body and soul, blessings at all times, at all hours, in all places

and under all conditions. Only in the light of the next life shall we be able to know their marvelous accomplishments in our behalf. With fervent love we should, therefore, cherish our guardian angel who bestows so much care upon our person and our interests. And yet, alas, I know of no benefactor who is as little remembered and held in honor. Each saint has special disciples and adherers, and this custom is very praiseworthy. But are we not worthy of censure if we forget the one who is of particular service, who in a very special manner watches over us, whose particular office it is to help and assist us?

Let us then give thought to the duties which we have towards our guardian angel. They are reverence, love and confidence.

We owe him reverence, and since he is at all times by our side, there is an obligation to conduct ourselves with modesty and circumspection, to do nothing that is unseemly and offensive to him. Let us renew often within us the remembrance of his presence; let us make this a pious custom, and it will be for us a bridle upon our passions, it will protect and keep us away from evil.

We owe him, furthermore, love, on account of the charity that he cherishes for us. This love and gratitude should animate us to thank him, to venerate him by our devotion and, in particular, to lend a willing ear to his instructions and admonitions and obediently to follow the same.

We owe our guardian angel, finally, our entire confidence. This protector lacks neither power nor willingness or inclination to assist us in all our needs. Therefore, we must have for him the appreciation that he deserves, must have recourse to him in dangers, doubts, in our afflictions and especially in temptations. The more lively our confidence is in him, the more perceptibly shall we experience the power of his protection.

We all desire that the important moment in which we cross over into the unchanging eternity shall be a good and happy one. Our arch-enemy will at that moment redouble his attacks upon us and we shall be in need of the most potent help against him. Let us, therefore, acquire the habit of heeding the whisperings of our guardian angel, so that in that last moment we shall be fortified by his counsel. He will stand by and support us in the struggle; he will obtain for us a good and happy death, a death that will open the door for us to eternal blessedness, in the realm of the angels and in the vision of God. Amen.

## XI. The Fear of God and Confidence in God

While man lives here on earth, be he ever so faithful an observer of the divine law, he can never be absolutely certain about his justification before God and about his eternal salvation. This truth is revealed to us in holy Scripture (Eccl. xii). Even the saints must say with the apostle: "For I am not conscious to myself of anything, yet in this I am not justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord" (I. Cor. iv, 4).

Our fate, therefore, is obscure and uncertain, until death, when the Lord will illuminate the darkness and make known the judgment.

We must have the firm and confident hope of attaining from God our eternal salvation and all means conducive to that end, this is based upon the goodness, truthfulness, and infinite mercy of God and upon the merits of the Redeemer. But this hope must never be separated from the holy and wholesome fear, and this holy fear begets a sturdy confidence in the mercy of God our Father.

It is true God has promised heaven to us, and all the necessary means in order to attain salvation. This promise, however, is given conditionally, it presupposes, for instance, our own co-operation, or, in other words, we must merit heaven through our own good works. For this very reason the heavenly reward is called the crown of justice (II. Tim. iv, 8); meaning reward for personal effort. God having destined us for heaven, has bestowed upon us an absolutely free gift independent of our effort; but its actual possession, while on the one hand a free gift of God, is on the other, the recompense

for our good works. For this reason Jesus Christ so strongly recommends to us industry, zeal and vigilance. He makes use of instructive parables, of the laborer (Matt. xx), the merchant (Matt. xiii, 45), and the unjust steward (Luke xvi), teaching indefatigable labor and prudence.

And while God promises us the necessary assistance, He expects on our part faithful co-operation, a continual solicitude in conquering our passions, frequent exercise of prayer and good works, means, which according to the words of St. Peter, are calculated to assure our vocation and election to eternal glory (II. Pet. i, 10). Divine grace is required in order to acquire merit, yet divine grace does not do away with our own co-operation.

Our confidence in God is justified and proper, because God can and will give every good, but we are not in the least sure whether on our part we shall not be wanting in the faithful performance of our duty. Therefore the apostle admonishes us "to work out our salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. ii, 12).

And though our confidence in God must be positive and firm, yet it must not disregard our own part in working our salvation. We must fear on account of ourselves, on account of our sins, our bad inclinations, our perversity, our inconstancy and frailty. Within us we have: Our naturally bad impulses, and our inclination to that which is corrupt, intensified by our sinful habits. Without us: The occasions to sin, the snares, perils and fascinations of all kinds with which we are surrounded. Will God not tire of our frequent falls? Will He not, in punishment for our ingratitude, withdraw His hand and let us go to ruin? Will He not let that strict justice apply to us which He exercises towards so many others on account of their wickedness? Who can ever be sure about persevering unto the end? Let us fear therefore; we have only too much reason to

fear. But this fear is a disposition of mind exceedingly pleasing to the Lord. For if confidence extols the power and mercy of God, so does this holy fear glorify His power and justice.

A holy fear of this kind is also profitable for ourselves, it makes us vigilant, cautious; it teaches us to judge things according to their right value and to choose the safest. The fear of offending God, of falling into sin and losing sanctifying grace, and of jeopardizing eternal salvation, induces the Christian to protect himself against danger by seeking God's assistance, or humbling himself, by watching and praying with utmost fervor. And in this consists the personal co-operation which God requires of us. For this reason the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, the foundation of salvation (Ps. cx, 10). The greatest saints of the Church lived in continual fear, on account of their own frailty. But, dear brethren, just as it is true that confidence must never exclude fear, so it is true also that fear must never prejudice our confidence in God. The more we distrust ourselves, the greater confidence must we place in God, our confidence in Him must be greater than our distrust in ourselves, as much as His goodness and sanctity surpasses our sinfulness, and His power our weakness.

If ever there was a man profoundly touched and penetrated with Divine fear, it was David, the royal singer. This we learn from his Psalms. But he was also animated with a great confidence in God, whom he calls his light, his weapon of defense, his strength, in the sure trust and guidance of which his life's course was happily accomplished, and he merited the Lord's peace in the blissful abode of eternal life. Let us learn from this that though confidence does not banish every fear still it prevents us from becoming anxious and discouraged, and our fear should not prevent us from having a firm confidence in God.

We must work out our salvation with fear and confidence. With fear, so as to continually guard against the many dangers that threaten us in this life, to arm ourselves with courage and strength, and, with the help of Divine grace, to triumph over all enemies and opponents. With firm confidence in God, who in His goodness and infinite mercy leads us as it were by the hand upon the right path to heaven. And thus we shall one day be crowned with the crown of justice, which the Lord holds in readiness for those who serve Him faithfully. Amen.

## XII. The Value of the Human Soul

If God's love for men is so great that it impels Him to lavish benefits upon them, even to give Himself to them; if He so ardently desires that the sinner be converted and hasten to the arms of His mercy; if He is so desirous of making us participators in His own glory, then truly there must be something exceedingly noble and precious in man and in his soul. If I could show you this precious soul which, as St. Paul says (II. Cor. iv, 7), finds itself shut up in the contemptible earthen vessels of our bodies, you would be filled with a holy pride and would take better pains to preserve this precious gift. We have a reasoning soul, created by God, destined to live on forever through eternity: it is the noblest of all created things which the Almighty has placed in this world.

It is impossible to value all the privileges of our soul, because we cannot fully comprehend the beauty, goodness and omnipotence of the One who created it. Nevertheless, I shall endeavor to draw your attention to a few of the soul's precious qualities by reminding you how it was created, how it was redeemed, and what a high opinion even the devil has of it.

A great difference exists between the creation of man and that of the other things in the world. We read in the Book of Genesis that the firmament, the light, the earth, the sea, sun, moon and stars, were created by the almighty Creator by a single word; that He gave life to trees and plants by commanding the earth to let them come forth; so, too, with the multitude of animals and other things. But when God determined to create man, He pro-

ceeded to make him after God's own most perfect image. Neither the earth nor the heavens were commissioned to bring him forth. The Creator prepared and formed man with His own hand. He drew the features of his face, and arranged the proportion of his limbs: His creative powers, His thought, His wisdom, His love, they all joined in active order to form man, that cherished object of His good pleasure. But the less noble part of man is to be subordinate to the higher part, the reasoning soul, and is to serve only as its abode.

The Almighty, in order to create the soul, drew, as it were, a breath of life from the depths of His heart, and thus imparted life to the clay. We can say with truth, therefore, that we have our origin in heaven (Serm. 24 in Cant. post. mad.).

As man consists of a perishable body, and of an immortal soul, therefore, the Royal Prophet declares that he is the inferior only of angels (Ps. viii, 8), and in many other parts of Holy Writ we learn with what expressions of tender love the Lord speaks of our soul. In one place He calls it His sister, in another His spouse (Cant. iv, 9). He declares it is fair, that it is His dove (Cant. i, 14). His friend, His well-beloved (Cant. iv, 1). He converses with it, calls it, speaks of it continually as if it were the sole work of His hands and alone capable of winning His heart. The value of the human soul stands forth still more forcibly when we consider its redemption. When the soul, through the fall of our first parents, had become the slave of satan, God in the superabundance of His goodness determined to ransom it. To create the soul the Lord sacrificed a vivifying breath of love from His heart, but, in order to ransom it, He sacrificed even His only begotten Son who, clothed in our flesh, suffered the most cruel passion, the most ignominious of deaths in payment of the ransom price.

Raise your eyes to the Cross. Look at the precious Blood that flowed from the veins of Christ. Behold the sacred hands pierced with thorns, the heavenly countenance disfigured by agony, hands and feet pierced by nails, the flesh torn by the scourge. Does that give you an idea of the value of your immortal soul? The price of the ransom paid for it!

The prince of darkness is not idle on his part, he persistently endeavors to subject the soul anew to his tyrannical dominion. Holy Writ tells us: "The devil is ever moving about in order to walk through the earth" (Job i, 7). He employs all his powers and endeavors in order to capture so precious a prey. Read the lives of the saints and you will find some of the artifices hell employs to overcome their strength and courage. And the Gospel tells us that satan led even the divine Saviour up onto a high mountain and offered Him all the kingdoms of the world if he would bend the knee to him and worship him. How is it possible then that man can have so little appreciation of his soul so dear in God's sight (Serm. 148 in init.). It is certain that its value is incomprehensible and unfathomable for those who do not understand the beauty, the omnipotence, the goodness and wisdom of that great God who vouchsafed to create it after His own image, and to redeem it at the price of the Blood of His only begotten Son.

Alas, there is nothing men seem to appreciate less than this precious treasure which the Almighty gave us when He instilled into us a reasoning soul. This most precious soul is considered inferior to a slight gain; regarded less than the satisfaction of shameful passions; men even use their best efforts to send it to hell. How is it possible that man so entirely of heavenly origin, who carries with him his inner life graven with the likeness of God, is not ashamed to wallow in the mire of sin, that he so lightly surrenders

his soul to satan? Brethren, you have only one soul, and you will lose everything if this noble part of yourself is suffered to go to perdition.

Therefore, dear brethren, be anxiously solicitous for the salvation of your souls. Give to it that honor which is befitting it according to the admonition of the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures (Eccl. x, 31). Remember that its purchase price was the adorable Blood of the Incarnate Son of God. Remember the soul is the most precious jewel in the whole world: upon its countenance it bears the impress of the Creator's beautiful image, and He desires to possess it in His glory as His spouse. Remember also that the devil, because he knows it to be of such priceless value, strains every nerve in order to get it into his power. Why defile its beauty by sin, why snatch it from that God who created it, who has ransomed it, and who would render it blessed forever and ever, why surrender it to the slavery of satan?

Away, then, with impurity, calumny, pride and other sins. Preserve with zealous care the infinitely precious treasure which you carry in your perishable body. Compel your bodies to do service to your priceless soul by prayer and the use of the holy Sacraments, and to secure for it that heavenly glory for which the soul is created and redeemed by God. Amen.

## XIII. The General Judgment

It is certain that every man will be judged immediately after death and, according to the work he has performed in life, his fate will be decided forevermore. In that moment the soul will be alone before Jesus Christ. As its Supreme Judge, He will pronounce the sentence upon the soul alone. For this reason and for many others there must be another tribunal, at which man will appear with body and soul before the judgment seat of God, to be rewarded, or punished, in both. It is proper that the body, which on earth was united to the soul, should participate with it in the same fate in eternity, because it was the instrument by means of which the soul during its earthly pilgrimage performed good or bad actions.

The general judgment, at which body and soul will appear at the end of the world, will, according to the gospel, be preceded by certain signs. The elements will be in a state of confusion. The earth will tremble to its very foundations. The sea will be lashed into fury, the earth will be threatened with inundation. The sun will be darkened, moon and stars will fall from the heavens (Matt. xxiv). Fire will burst from the earth and consume all living things.

After these terrible things have taken place and the death agony of the world will have been accomplished, the angel of the Lord will let his mighty voice be heard, and it will awaken the dead resting in the grave, and will call them before the Divine tribunal. "Arise ye dead, and come to judgment." At that moment all the

dead, all who ever lived upon earth, from the creation of mankind to the last day, will come forth, and Divine omnipotence will assemble them for judgment. But what a difference between the resurrected bodies. The just will arise and appear shining in glory and clothed with beauty. The bodies of the damned will arise hideous and frightful. Great will be the joy of the just when they see their bodies so gloriously transformed for the part they took during their earthly life in good works. And awful will be the anguish of the lost souls, when they find themselves united to the cursed instruments of their crimes, to endure with them the everlasting torments of hell fire kindled by outraged justice.

The whole human race is now assembled. Heaven opens and upon a shining cloud appears our divine Saviour in celestial majesty and clothed with omnipotence (Matt. xxiv). Millions of bright angels surround His throne, others are massed before Him, in their hands the exalted emblem of our redemption, the Cross, on which our sins were wiped out (*Ibid.*)

Thereupon begins the revealing of consciences. The sins and virtues of each one of that immense multitude will appear as if in a gigantic mirror before the eyes of all. All men there assembled see in themselves and in others the minutest details of their whole lives. Then the angels will begin the separation. Upon their right, they will place the just who have lived a good life; upon the other side, the sinners dead to grace and salvation (Matt. xxv). There husband will be separated from wife, father and mother from their children, brother from brother, sister from sister. Poor servants and laborers, who received scant attention during their lives, will stand upon the right, whilst upon the left may be seen those that held high positions, now raising the awful cry of the damned: "Ye mountains fall upon us, and cover us ye hills. Remove from us

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the disgrace that oppresses us, the remorse of conscience that devours us. O how hard it is to fall into the hands of the living God!"

And then the Supreme Judge will lovingly turn towards the just and pronounce the sweet words: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you, from the foundation of the world" (Matt. xxv), which you have merited by your virtuous lives and your perseverance. I no longer call you to crosses and sufferings, no more to struggle and combat. No. I am here to lead you into everlasting rest; I invite you now to the bliss of heaven. You will enjoy a happiness without end. I shall be with you always, and you shall be with Me for all time, from eternity to eternity.

And then the Judge will with fearful countenance turn to the reprobate and pronounce the curse upon them: Depart from Me ye cursed, into everlasting fire (Matt. xxv). During your lives I gave you every means of salvation, but you rejected them. How often did I invite you by the mouth of the teachers of salvation and your confessors to conversion and penance, but you heeded Me not. How many examples of virtue and piety did the just set before your eyes, but you would pay no attention to them. Where are your works? I enjoined upon you virtuous actions, and I see only sins, vices, crimes: I asked of you your heart's love, and you were cold to me, indifferent and even contemptuous: I required of you to love your neighbor, I considered everything as done to myself that was done to him, and you had no love for him, you had only self-seeking, hard-heartedness and avarice: "Depart from Me ye cursed into everlasting fire." The earth opens, the lost are plunged into the abyss of hell where their misery will endure eternally.

"Whenever I think of that awful day," St. Jerome often said, "my body trembles. Whether I eat or drink, or whatever else I

do, I imagine I can hear the awful sound of that trumpet ringing in my ears: Arise ye dead and come to judgment."

Dear brethren, if the Judge should call us to-day, what would be our lot? Where does your conscience place you, upon the right or at the left? Choose your place now. It is for you to decide. A life of sin, places you at the left; a life of virtue leads you to the right of Jesus, to the road to heaven, to the glory of paradise. Make your choice now. Amen.

## XIV. Hell

The omnipotent God who called us into existence for His own purpose, who cherishes for us the love of the most tender of fathers, has destined us all, without exception, for the happiness of heaven. This happiness shall be ours, if, during our short term of natural life, we offer Him due homage. If, however, instead of loving and serving Him we offend Him by sin, and unrepentant die in that state, then He who would be our supreme happiness will instead condemn us to eternal misery. There is no middle way. He who renounces heaven chooses eternal damnation. Either rejoice eternally with the blessed, or suffer eternally with the reprobate. A frightful alternative, dear brethren, one which ought to impress upon us the necessity of reflecting seriously upon our eternal fate and our salvation, which is the one thing needful, as Jesus Christ tells us in the Gospel. In order to incite in us a greater zeal for our salvation, let us to-day consider the wretched fate of those who neglected to consider seriously the end for which they were created, and who are in hell, suffering the sum and substance of all misery.

We are bound to believe that there is a hell, and it would be a sin against faith to doubt its existence. Yet, even among Catholics there are not wanting those who ridicule the idea of hell, and pretend to see in it an invention of the priests. To them I say they are contradicting their faith and sound reason as well. It is a fact, indeed, that we cannot deny hell without at the same time denying the existence of God. For, if we accept God, then this God must be an infinitely perfect Being, of necessity holy and just. His Provi-

dence must watch over all, and He must be an enemy and avenger of wrong in any and every form. Where would His sanctity be, where His Providence, if He let sin, and vice, and crime go unpunished?

But they say, do we not see that in this world unrighteousness not only often goes unpunished, but even seems to be the road to success and wealth? Yes; and for this very reason a state of punishment and of retribution is surely necessary in the other life, otherwise, indeed, the Divine government would be lacking in the justice which even the princes of this world endeavor to mete out to their subjects. Because, therefore, such government would be unjust and manifestly at variance with the idea of God as the supreme and most perfect Being, the belief in God compels the belief in hell as a place where Divine justice punishes offenders who escaped punishment before their death.

That place of horrors, called hell, prepared by God for the fallen angels and their adherents, for those, therefore, who die in rebellion to their Maker, in the state of unrepented mortal sin, holds a double punishment, namely, of sense and of loss. Both are indicated frequently in Holy Writ, particularly in that final sentence which the gospel tells us Jesus Christ will pass upon the reprobate: "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire." Depart from Me, this means punishment of loss; into everlasting fire, the punishment of sense.

In hell there is a real and actual fire, as Holy Writ expressly declares. It is more terrible, much more scathing, than our earthly fire. For the latter is given to us by God for our benefit and use; hell, however, is created by the wrath of His justice as a punishment.

Now, if even our earthly fire is so powerful and so ravaging, what

a terrible instrument it must be in the hands of an avenging God, who will make it continue to burn throughout eternity, without for a moment mitigating its fury!

That fire has power also to attack the spiritual soul. Hence it not only tortures bone and marrow, it penetrates to the soul to torture it also. For this reason it is called not only fire, but also the spirit of fire, the breath of Divine wrath.

This fire combines in itself all kinds of tortures, and for this reason hell is called the "place of torments." There is no torture, no pain, no horror the damned soul does not suffer in hell.

Every sense of the body is tortured, in proportion to its former misuse. Its heat will increase where it encounters greater malice and graver sins. They greatly err who are of opinion that the punishment is the same whether one is damned for one or for many sins. God will mete out punishment proportionate in severity to the number and malice of the sinner's misdeeds. Oh, could we but describe adequately and place before you the desperate agony, the fathomless slough of despond of hell. And there are Christians who are reckless and daring enough to say: "If I am damned, I shall probably know how to bear it patiently." Oh, senseless fools. In hell there is no patience. There is only fury, rage, and despair.

The punishment of the senses, as I have depicted it, should make a profound impression; it relates to the senses, yet it is not the greatest punishment that falls to the reprobate.

Far greater is the punishment of loss of the vision of God. The bliss of the Divine vision is incomprehensible to us until we cross the threshold of eternity. The sinner has turned his back upon God, and God now will turn away from the sinner, who has sold his birthright to participate in the happiness which comes from the vision of God. This punishment of the loss of God is not likely to

make on us now the impression that the punishment of fire makes, because we now live in the region of the senses. God seems far away from us.

Hence we see men heed so little the loss of God and His grace, and even continue after the loss to live in contentedness and seeming enjoyment as if nothing untoward had taken place, although their misfortune is the greatest.

It is quite otherwise in the next life, where all deceitful appearances of this world and all diversions of the senses will have vanished. When the soul shall have been delivered from the body, worldly considerations will no longer affect it. Standing in the radiance of God's countenance and enveloped in an unspeakable light, there is imparted to it the clear vision of the magnificence of God. The soul feels itself drawn to God alone, because it is created for God alone, and God is its sole desire and happiness. To be rejected by God and cursed forevermore, this fate begets a despair and a suffering greater as a punishment than even the torture of hell fire. It becomes impossible for the soul to contemplate God as its Supreme good, and desire is turned into hatred, because it must look upon God as its tormentor and enemy. Yet, while it hates God, it cannot cease to yearn for Him, and in yearning for Him it cannot help hating Him. Its hatred is ever combated by its desire, and its desire is ever opposed by hatred. Oh, what fearful agony this must be.

And now comes that other torment, called by Jesus Christ the worm of conscience. It consists in the agonizing consciousness of having lost God, solely because the soul willed to lose Him. This thought, ever present to the damned soul, will be the gnawing worm; it will torture the soul in all its faculties, in memory, reason and will. The lost soul will then turn against itself, as Holy Writ says;

it will curse the day of its birth, its parents, the saints—yes, even God Himself. How frightful the place, how awful the abyss that harbors such wretches!

And how long will this state of things endure? Alas, forever. There will be no end? NEVER. Terrible word. May these considerations leave an indelible imprint upon our minds and hearts. They are a sure means of protecting against the awful fate of falling into the avenging hands of almighty God. Amen.

## XV. Heaven

How unhappy at times is our natural life. Suffering and adversity on the one hand; contradictions, injustice, and oppression upon the other. The world, by its flattery, deceives and dupes us. Satan hovers around us in order to bring about our ruin; we are opposed by malicious fellow men, or are at war with ourselves, when the flesh rebels against the spirit, and concupiscence contends against reason; truly, this life is beset with troubles and difficulties.

But let us be comforted, dear brethren; our home is not on this earth; our lot is not so thoroughly unhappy as this world would make it. We are destined for an utterly different life, one that is different from anything earthly. Our earthly life is only a brief journey, which leads through suffering and affliction to heaven. We are destined for heaven, and eternal joys are our true end. For this purpose our heavenly Father has created us; for this purpose the Son of God descended from heaven, became incarnate and ransomed us at the price of His Passion and death; for this purpose the Holy Ghost sanctifies us without intermission through His gifts and graces; all the works of the most adorable Trinity are intended to lead us to the happiness of heaven.

Heaven combines in itself two essential privileges: namely, the deliverance from all evils and the possession of all good. A brief meditation upon our heavenly Paradise will cause us to yearn more and more for it, and will incite us to more zeal in assuring to us the final possession of heaven.

The first privilege which the blessed enjoy in heaven is the deliverance from all evil. This privilege is easy to comprehend; it does not surpass the capabilities of our understanding. The inexpressible good which the blessed enjoy we cannot understand, but we know only too well the evils from which they are freed; of these evils there is, for instance, the constant combat of the flesh against the spirit. There are the passions that tyrannize over the soul, thoughts that make it uneasy, desires that torment it, contrition over the past, dissatisfaction with the present, anxiety about the future, vexation, bitterness, unrest. There is for the body oppressive toil, illness which wears out good health, possibly poverty, sudden misfortunes, disappointments, disloyalty of friends, betrayal, envy, secret or open persecution. Truly, life is filled with adversities from which we shall be liberated only by our death. If we then turn to virtuous persons, lovers of God and strivers for eternal salvation, who may count the sacrifices and fears that they undergo on account of their future state, on account of the many possibilities of offending God, and of being eternally separated from Him? Even saints who lived in the assurance of being united to God by the bond of grace have trembled nevertheless at the thought of being able to lose Him and their salvation.

The Holy Ghost assures us that this multitude of evils will be excluded forever from the abode of the blessed. In fact, all the evils which afflict us here on earth are punishments for sin, for through sin they came into the world; and since sin will be banished from heaven, so likewise will be sorrow and adversity. In heaven there will be nothing that can worry, injure or oppress us, no want, no fear, no unsatisfied desire. If in heaven we had only this to expect and nothing else, then assuredly it would be a great good indeed; but this is only a small part of its privileges.

In addition to deliverance from all evil, heaven is the full possession of every good. Here, however, our powers fail us in any endeavor to speak of happiness of the elect. Even St. Paul, who, in spirit at least, saw the bliss of heaven, could only say that no human eye had seen, nor ear heard, and that it had not entered into the heart of man, what God had prepared for them that love Him. In these words the magnitude and glory of heaven are indicated. All the sublime wonders of visible creation, all the beauty of the achievements of men, are, according to the words of the apostle, as nothing in comparison to the splendor of heaven.

The greatest happiness of the blessed will consists in the fact that God will be their supreme reward, that He will make them happy by giving Himself to them, and that plenitude of boundless happiness which He enjoys according to His own nature. The actual nature of the heavenly bliss, and the real sum and substance of all good is to see God, to love Him, and to possess Him. From this intimate union with God ensue for the soul complete satisfaction, perfect contentment, supreme happiness.

During our earthly life we cannot see God with our eyes; in heaven, however, we shall, strengthened by the light of His glory, rest our gaze upon Him, behold Him face to face, know Him as He is and appreciate His worth. And what do the words mean: "To behold Him unveiled"? They mean to know Him just as He is. The unity of His nature, the Trinity of Persons, His infinite perfections, the treasures of His wisdom, His goodness, His omnipotence, His sanctity.

And again, as God, in the fullest sense, comprises in Himself all things which have been, still are, and shall be in the future, even all possible things, thus the vision of God will impart to the elect a clear knowledge of all hidden mysteries, in the kingdom of nature

as well as in the order of grace. Thus our understanding will be filled with knowledge and light, our natural longing for wisdom will be completely satisfied. Everything will be uncovered and made manifest.

But to see God means not only to know Him and all things else, but it means also to love Him. In fact, when we actually see God, then we shall find in Him our supreme good, the great infinite plenitude, the essence of all beauty and virtue—briefly, everything that man might wish for. Hence it would be impossible for the blessed not to love Him with the fervor and fondest rapture of their souls. And then hearts will be filled with peace, and joy, and the desire for happiness, so often disappointed here below, will be completely satisfied. For there will be no other occupation than to love, without intermission, an object which is infinitely lovable, and alone capable of perfectly contenting all our wishes.

Finally, to see God means to love Him and possess Him. Our love of God will be a love of enjoyment, of rest, of most intimate union, whereby the blessed soul will be wholly immersed in God and God in return will communicate Himself wholly to the blessed, making them participants in His own happiness. As iron in the furnace is penetrated to such a degree by fire, that without ceasing to be iron it can no longer be distinguished from the fire, so the blessed intimately unite to God without losing the nature of creatures, they will know by God's wisdom, work by God's power, and live eternally by the Divine life. Truly sublime and blissful truths, dear brethren. A boundless delight, a joy, that here below one cannot picture, complete and perfect bliss, lasting without interruption and remaining ever new and always increasing throughout eternity.

This, dear brethren, is a brief summary, a feeble picture, a mere shadow of those great things which God has prepared as recom-

pense in heaven for the works of the just here below. It should require no further incentive to induce us to struggle for possession of these eternal privileges. We would be deficient in faith, in reason, and in love for ourselves, if we were to hesitate at paying the trifling price for such immense recompense. Amen.

## XVI. Afflictions

The world's recompense for man's efforts is often disappointing. Fascinated by the glitter of earthly things, men think they will find in them gratification and happiness. People try to outstrip their neighbors in acquiring wealth, in order to procure the coveted happiness and to remove from their path every suffering as far as possible. They who live in superfluity and luxury are looked upon as blessed, as persons whose every wish is gratified, whereas they who have to pass their lives in poverty, in deprivation, are considered unfortunate, as ill-favored by fate. The apparently ill-favored persons frequently break out in complaints, even in blasphemies against divine Providence. Alas, dear brethren, what folly and shortsightedness. These worldly views are the inventions of the passions, of the enemies of true human happiness. The wisdom of God, of the Saviour, teaches us that true happiness is not found in earthly things, that we must rather look for the same in the life to come; that the path to true happiness is not the path of roses, of comforts, of pleasures, but the path of mortification, of suffering, the way of the Cross. This is the path that our divine Saviour showed us, the path He trod Himself, to give us an example for our imitation.

Suffering, therefore, is the only true path that will lead us from earth to heaven. In order to encourage you to bear afflictions patiently for the love of God, I will show you that they are beneficial for the sinner, necessary for the penitent, and profitable for the just, so that no one ought to complain about his afflictions, but should rather praise God and return thanks for them.

God has decreed that the human race, after a brief life on earth, shall share the delights of his glory in heaven. That man may not deviate from the right path which leads to heaven, He has instilled into the human heart a powerful desire for true happiness, and this desire renders his existence an unsatisfactory one until he attains this happiness in the vision of the beauty of his God and Creator. And yet, despite the great love of God, despite this powerful incentive, so many men turn away from God and abandon themselves to the fleeting and deceitful pleasures of this brief life, and instead of seeking the path to heaven they hasten on the road to perdition.

God desires that all men be saved, and though He will not compel them, because He will not deprive them of free will, still He endeavors to attract them to Himself by the bond of His love, and to lead them in the right path. He enlightens their understanding, makes them realize the state in which they are living; He moves their hearts to abhor sin, and fills them with love for virtue; He places obstacles in their way when they are inclined to gratify their sinful desires, and grants power to the words of the priests to move them to repentance. But, hardened in sin, they often render these inspirations of divine grace ineffectual. They love their chains, they decline to listen to the ministers of Christ who urge them to be converted. Seeing their hard-heartedness, the Lord then often sends them afflictions and suffering, so that, realizing the vanity of earthly things, they may turn towards spiritual treasures that alone are capable of bringing happiness and peace.

Wo to those living in sin, if even adversity will not recall them from the fatal path they follow, a path which leads to eternal destruction.

Now, you may tell me that you can easily understand why God sends adversity to the impious, in order to bring about their con-

version, but often you see those also in suffering who strive to live a good life. Why should they be afflicted, you say. Dear brethren, who of us is entirely free from sin, and who does all he should for the glory of God and the benefit of his soul? If God in His wisdom and mercy punishes us for our shortcomings in this life, He spares us from much greater punishment in the life to come. Divine mercy forgives us our failings on account of our sincere contrition, but think not that on that account we may escape all punishment for our sins. After David had expressed his grief over his errors, the prophet sent by God announced to him that his sins were forgiven, but though he could not doubt this Divine message, still he ceased not to do penance, and despite his penance he was made to feel the severity of Divine chastisement in various ways.

Even after our sins and eternal punishment are remitted by Divine mercy, there is satisfaction due to Divine justice in the form of temporal punishment, and it is vastly easier for us to make this satisfactiton in this life than in the fire of purgatory. Furthermore, God in order to prevent our relapse into former errors, mingles with the joys that the pleasures of the world cause us, an amount of bitterness, and thereby awakens in us, as St. Augustine says, the remembrance of the eternal treasures and the desire to attain that happiness which is alone real and unmixed with bitterness.

Finally, we should cheerfully accept the trials that God sends us, because they are very profitable even to the just, in order to increase their merits. Even Christ, the purest and most perfect, announced that it was necessary for Him, in order to attain the glory that the Father had destined for Him, to walk in the path of suffering (Luke xxiv, 26). He repeats this through the mouth of the Apostle Paul: "I have prepared for you, through my death, joys

which never cease, a happiness that never diminishes; but the way which leads to this goal is that of tribulations."

How, then, may we, dear brethren, refuse to bear trials patiently, trials that acquire for us eternal joys? In our afflictions let us raise our eyes to heaven. It is the Lord who sends them to us, and He sends them for no other purpose than that after our death we may enter the joys of His glory. In order to bear suffering with profit, let us resign ourselves willingly without murmur or complaint to His holy will, and let us say with St. Paul: "I am filled with comfort; I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulation" (I Cor. vii, 4). This is the true way of drawing great profit and merit from afflictions. Amen.

## XVII. The Virtue of Hope and the Sins That Are Opposed to It

To-day, dear brethren, I wish you to consider with me the most consoling virtue of hope. I cannot think of a better or more powerful illustration of this virtue than pious Job. Behold in him a man who had fallen from the heights of happiness and temporal well-being into the abyss of want and misery. His flocks, his houses and lands were taken from him. His many and good children were buried in the ruins of their homes. Had he remained unharmed in his own person he could at least by the work of his hands have earned his living. But a loathsome disease covered his body and sapped his strength, so that he was abandoned lying in an unclean place, where he cried out: "Oh, God, I have lost everything. What still remains of this miserable form of a man, but lips?" This man, dear brethren, is the symbol of our own condition, the condition to which sin has brought mankind. What remains of the splendor that formerly was given to man—the Paradise, the incorruptibility, the innocence, the virtue, all the innumerable graces that should distinguish mankind? Behold the devastation, ignorance and lack of understanding, violence of the passions, weakness of the will. Truly, mankind has been more sorely deprived of its possession than pious Job had been of his.

Yet, dear brethren, we have in spite of this loss and this misery, a Father in heaven animated by infinite benevolence towards us, and of infinite power, who will cure us of all ills and enrich us with His boundless treasures. Let us rest our gaze upon Him confidingly, place in Him our hope, and we shall again become truly rich in this life and be glorified with Him in heaven.

Let us now consider what our hope should be to merit heaven.

Hope is a supernatural virtue infused by God into our souls, by means of which we, by leading a good life, firmly and without any doubt expect of God our eternal salvation, and also the means necessary thereto, relying upon the promise and the merits of Jesus Christ.

Faith assures us that there is a heaven with an abundance of delight and bliss, that this realm of happiness was created and prepared for mankind; and hope tells us that it will be our portion if we do not voluntarily exclude ourselves from it through the commission of sin.

But to accomplish our salvation and gain admission to heaven, there are many conditions to be fulfilled. We must mortify ourselves, love God, keep His commandments, do penance for our sins, and persevere faithfully in His friendship to the end.

With the hope of attaining to the vision of God there must be combined the confidence that God will give us the necessary means to reach this goal, namely, the grace to avoid sin, to overcome temptations, to observe His commandments, the confiding self-assurance that if we fall into sin He will compassionately hold out His hand and help us return to Him.

And may even a sinner hope when, on account of his guilty conscience, he has more reason to fear? To answer this question, we must ask what is to be understod here by the word sinner? If we refer to those who, having offended God, do not strive for contrition, then I must say that such sinners have little justification for hope. Obduracy in sin indicates an absence of hope. But sinners who have sorrow and seek God may indeed hope, and their hope will not be in vain. In order to encourage and strengthen our hope, let us remember all that the Divine mercy has done for us. What proof

does not God give us daily of His fostering love. He created a great world for us and furnished it with innumerable creatures. And when by their fall our first parents had forfeited the right to heaven and had burdened us with guilt, the only begotten Son of God clothed Himself with our flesh, to take upon Himself the chastisement due our sins, that He might remove our guilt with His Blood. He let Himself be nailed upon the ignominious Cross, to open to us the door of heaven; and now He nourishes with His own sacred Body those who had rebelled against Him. He has done all this, and His superabounding love calls to us from the Cross: "Banish fear, for I have rescued thee" (Ps. lxx, 2). Behold, the eternal God loves the sinner so intensely that He hastens after him to recall him to virtue and to salvation. Truly, he who does not trust firmly in God ignores the goodness of God and scorns His mercy.

There are two detestable sins in opposition to hope: Despair and presumption. They grievously offend God and will surely lead to perdition. Persons who live for a long while in sin, instead of taking refuge in the Divine mercy, frequently abandon themselves to despair and imagine themselves to be irrevocably lost. These persons sin not only against hope, but also against faith. For either they do not believe that God will in His mercy lovingly receive the sinner who makes a resolution of amendment, or they do not believe that the Blood of the divine Redeemer shed so abundantly has the power to efface all sins, however great may be their number and gravity. These unfortunates have become Godless, and render themselves guilty of the perversity of Cain and Judas, who would not place their hope in the Divine mercy to obtain pardon for their crimes.

To offend God by a grievous sin is certainly a great evil. But the

mercy and love of the Lord are so great that He is ever ready to give us back our spiritual life, if we contritely turn to Him; He even commands us to hope for forgiveness. Hence it follows that those who despair of finding forgiveness for their sins, cast themselves into hell by their own obstinacy.

The victims of despair are probably less numerous than those of presumption. There are many who imagine that they will go to heaven despite their impenitence and obstinacy in sinful lives. The mercy of God is infinite, they say; Jesus Christ died upon the Cross in order to merit heaven for all of us; a single act of perfect contrition will efface all sins. So many have passed their lives in sin and vice, yet were finally converted. The Lord wills that all should be saved. So they speak, and what they say is true, but the application to their own conduct is false. They presumptuously seek in the Divine mercy a support for their evil deeds, and an excuse to continue their vicious lives. Because God is good and merciful, they mean to go on insulting Him by a life of sin. Such manner of speaking, such presumption of thought, is a grievous sin against the Holy Ghost, because Divine mercy is abused in an impious way and perverted into a license for viciousness.

In God there is to be found not only mercy, but justice also. He is good, but also just and holy, and because He is just and holy He cannot permit His goodness to serve as an incentive to wickedness. Hence it follows that those who thus presume render themselves unworthy and incapable of securing forgiveness. The mercy of God which in Holy Scripture is so highly extolled avails only to those who humble themselves and who hasten to return to God, but does not serve as a refuge for sinners. It threatens, on the contrary, with the rigors of justice all those who remain obdurate in their sins because of their presumptuous confidence in His goodness (Eccl. v, 7).

We have seen therefore that in the suffering of this life our hearts must find their sole support in hope. We must never despair of the Divine mercy, no matter how numerous and grievous our sins may be, but it is necessary to found our hope upon the practise of good works. Repentance over past sins, observance of the Divine law, reception of the most holy Sacraments, zeal in prayer and hope in Divine mercy—these are the means that will justify in us the hope of eternal happiness. Amen.

## XVIII. Penance as a Virtue

The same God who declared that He will not permit anything defiled to take part in His glory also provided a means to render even the greatest of sinners worthy of entering heaven. If your sins be ever so grievous and numerous, a means is offered to rid yourself of them. Repent of your sins, humble yourself before the Lord, do penance, and you shall belong to the number of His children. He will remember your sins no more. He will receive you with compassion and ardent love. He has declared this through the Prophet Ezechiel (Ezech. xxxiii, 12).

Penance is necessary for all men. It is the only way that leads to heaven. The Son of God teaches through the Evangelist St. Luke: "Unless you do penance, you shall all likewise perish" (Luke xiii, 5). Penance is indispensable for all of us, if we wish to work out our salvation.

Sinners resemble those unfortunate people who, far out on the ocean, are overtaken by a terrific storm which threatens to bury them in the watery grave. Only one hope remains if the ship goes to pieces, namely, the life-preservers that keep the shipwrecked from perishing. Such a life-preserver for sinners is penance, in which they must place their confidence when the enormity of their offenses threatens to bury them in hell.

It happens often that the Lord exercises His mercy toward the sinner to such a degree that it almost seems as if He ignored His justice. He knocks insistently at the door of his heart, He entices him by the prospect of reward, He terrifies him by the threat of

chastisement and admonishes him to detest his sins and to return to God. It suffices not for the sinner, however, to cease his evil deeds in order to be converted to the God he has so greatly offended. The offended God cannot be appeased if the sinner simply ceases the offense. God asks for more, He requires satisfaction for the offenses inflicted upon Him. He must have proofs of contrition, He must have penance. "Be converted to Me," He says through His prophet Joel (Joel ii, 12), "with all your heart, in fasting, and in weeping, and in moaning," namely, by works of penance.

It is well to remember that penitential exercises are necessary not only as satisfaction and expiation for sins committed, but also as protection against sin. It would avail little to have begun well if one made a bad end. What did it avail Judas to have been chosen one of the apostles when afterward he became a traitor, and died a prey to horrible despair?

Let us consider the manner of living of the just who now enjoy the joys of heaven? Self-denial, patience in suffering, and penitential exercises of every description, furnished the foundation upon which they erected the edifice of their sanctification. Though John the Baptist was sanctified in his mother's womb, there has never been one who surpassed him in penance and in the rigor of living. The Blessed Virgin surpassed all angels and saints in innocence and sanctity; she was full of grace, she was elevated to the dignity of Mother of God, and yet she humbly submitted to suffering, leading a life of penance and mortification. Jesus Christ Himself, although the eternal Son of God and sanctity Himself, was born in dire poverty, lived in privation and died in sorrows.

If the saints, nay, even the Incarnate Son of God Himself, trod the path of suffering, what other way is open to us in order to gain heaven? Let us understand thoroughly, dear brethren, that

the time which the divine compassion grants us here below is a respite granted by divine justice to the human race, to do penance, and to enrich itself by good works and thus merit eternal reward. In consideration of this great truth, what must we think then of so many Christians around us? Original sin has made sinners of us all, and still there are those whose sole concern is to seek comfort in an easy and pampered life, who ridicule penitential exercises. Some even seem to think they do not need a devout prayer even in church, if they at all attend it. To excuse themselves from fasting they offer many idle reasons, and at the very mention of penance they are displeased or offended.

Nevertheless, these persons must understand that without penance it is impossible to be saved. Many, indeed, have the desire to do penance, but only a few make an earnest beginning. Hence, so many are overtaken by death without doing the necessary penance. But, you may say, God is a loving Father of mercy, we put our trust in Him, He will give us the grace of contrition. When do you expect to have the necessary contrition, when will you do penance? The Lord has promised to receive us graciously if we penitently turn to Him, but has He promised that He would give you another year, even another day, of time? Certainly not. God has promised indulgence and mercy, says St. Augustine, but He has promised to no one the morrow. To-day, even this very night, death may surprise you. How many people, young and old, healthy and strong as the most robust of you, have died when they least expected it. And in this uncertainty, in this awful peril of being overtaken by eternal perdition, how can you dare to postpone your penance for even a moment?

But even if your life lasted as long as that of Adam, do you suppose that you could excite at will the sentiments of penance after

having so long neglected them? You *might* repent of your sins, but *will* you repent of them? Contrition for your sins must necessarily spring from displeasure at having offended God, either because He is the supreme, infinite Good and worthy to be loved above all things, or because He is the severe judge of the sinner and punishes their crimes with hell fire, or because sin, regarded in the light of faith, is exceedingly abominable. If these motives suffice not now to move you to penance, how can you cherish the hope that they will suffice at some future time? The habit of sin will even lessen the influence of these motives upon your heart, and finally your heart will be entirely hardened in sin. To those who would rely upon the divine mercy the Lord declares that He is filled with wrath toward obdurate sinners who have closed their ears to His loving admonitions and that He will laugh at their destruction and ruin (Prov. i, 26).

Therefore, I say, now, now is the time of penance. Be converted to Me, says the Lord, now and not later. Take counsel with yourselves, amend your ways, reform your lives. Do penance, and do it at once; otherwise you run the danger of not being able to do penance. And without the necessary penance nothing remains but eternal damnation. May God preserve you all from such a terrible fate. Amen.

## XIX. How to Pray

"If you ask the Father anything in My Name, he will give it to you" (John xvi, 23). This is the promise the divine Saviour gave to His disciples. A magnificent promise that only God could make. In order to obtain anything from our heavenly Father, we are ordered to ask Him for it; to pray for it; prayer, therefore, is necessary. It is the means ordained by God to obtain from His goodness the graces and the assistance we require. Prayer is efficacious. It obtains from God everything that our welfare in this world and in the next requires. Moreover, those who take pains to pray show that they have their soul's welfare at heart, while those who neglect prayer show that they care little about their eternal salvation.

Nevertheless, dear brethren, God does not hear every prayer. In order that He may be favorably disposed towards your petitions, your prayer, before all things, must be accompanied with sorrow for your past sins. We all are sinners, and if anyone says he is without sin, he is speaking an untruth, so the Holy Ghost warns us (John i, 8). But is not our sinful condition an obstacle to the efficacy of prayer? Can we properly pray in the state of sin? Yes, we can, if the prayer be prompted by the resolution to desist from sin, if it proceed from a heart that experiences genuine sorrow for its attachment to sin, and the prayer for strength to break the bonds of sin is surely heard. You cannot pray in a worthy manner if you do not feel contrition for your sins. If, instead of taking refuge with Jesus Christ so that He may help you to break the chains which bind you to sin, you oppose His grace that incites you to repentance,

if you desire to remain in sin, if you continue to transgress His commandments and despise His graces, how can God graciously listen to your prayers? If you pray, and at the same time continue to love sin, you surely cannot expect that God will hear you. He abhors prayer of which your heart knows nothing, and He warns you: "When you stretch forth your hands, I will turn away my eyes from you; and when you multiply prayer, I will not hear; for your hands are full of blood" (Is. i, 15).

If you desire to have your prayer heard, you must cease to give way to anger and impatience; you must forgive those who have inflicted a wrong upon you; you must be charitable; you must renounce your pride, desist from sinful and dissolute habits, detest sin, otherwise your prayer will be an abomination in God's sight (Prov. xviii, 9). He will hear your prayer if you begin it with a petition for forgiveness, if you say with the Psalmist: "O Lord, be Thou merciful to me; heal my soul, for I have sinned against Thee" (Ps. xl, 5). If you mean these words sincerely, if they really come from your heart, then I assure you that God will have pity upon you; He will grant you His grace, and even if you have been guilty of the basest crimes, He will have mercy upon you.

The second quality of a good prayer is devotion — the interior recollection of spirit. Prayer is conversing with God. Through prayer the soul, as it were, is admitted and introduced into the Lord's sanctuary. It states its needs to God, it honors and glorifies Him, it adores Him, returns thanks to Him and submits its petitions to Him. A religious act of this kind must not be merely an exterior function; it requires the undivided attention of mind and heart, and when we pray, every other thought should vanish from our mind.

You would consider it a great offense and a want of appreciation if someone should come to ask a favor of you, and instead of pay-

ing attention to his talk with you, would direct his glance and thought to other things. What, then, will God think of us, and what offense is it, when we pray to Him and honor Him with our lips alone, whilst our hearts are far from Him (Is. xxix, 13).

With whom do you converse in prayer? With God, the almighty, the all-knowing Lord of the universe. What do you ask? You ask of God eternal glory, eternal happiness, the grace of possessing Him eternally and of enjoying Him everlastingly. What, indeed, could be more important for us? And yet so many perform this sacred and exalted act with indifference and negligence. How can they expect that God will hear them?

Are distractions in prayer always sinful? No, dear brethren. When distractions are not voluntary, if they displease you, if you do everything in your power to guard against them, then they will be to your credit, by your patience in bearing them, by your zeal in trying to keep them away, and by persevering in prayer notwithstanding these distractions, you will gain great merit before God. But be careful that they be not voluntary; do not seek them; repel them immediately. When they are the effect of your will, or of your negligence, then the Holy Spirit tells you that your prayer is deserving of no consideration whatever (Eccl. xviii, 23). "In fact," says St. Cyprian, "what proof do you give of your desire to be heard if you do not even yourself know of what you are speaking?" Remember that when you pray you claim the honor and distinction of conversing with the supreme Lord of heaven and earth; therefore think of God and of that for which you ask, and remember that it is necessary to ask for it with confidence. This is the third condition in order to pray well.

Be firmly convinced that the Lord will hear your prayer, provided that for which you pray contributes to His honor and to the sanctifi-

cation of your soul. St. James forbids us to doubt of it (St. James i, 6). "Ask, and you shall receive" (John xvi, 24). Why should you hesitate? It is the Holy Spirit that prays in you (Rom. viii, 26). It is the Son of God who prays for us, He who died and rose again, and who sitteth at the right hand of God (Rom. viii, 34). True, we are of ourselves unworthy of obtaining even the least favor from God. But if we begin our prayer with the acknowledgment of our weakness, of our unworthiness, then we shall secure the assistance of the Son of God, our intercessor (John ii, 1, 2), and of the Holy Ghost, our sanctifier (Rom. viii, 15). Hence the apostle admonishes us to approach the throne of grace with the utmost confidence (Heb. iv, 16).

It may happen that your prayers are apparently not heard, and St. Augustine rejoices in this fact, because the refusal is profitable for us. God refuses us a grace in order to give us a better one in its stead: He will resist our desires if our welfare requires this. Complain not, dear brethren, if God delays in hearing you; submit yourself to His holy Will. Do not go and say: "Prayer is of no advantage to me; I never get what I ask; not the removal of that cross, which so oppresses me; not relief from the disease which causes me so much suffering." Dear friend, if God has not heard you, is it not because you have not lived a pious life? And that for which you prayed, are you sure that it would be salutary for your soul and for your eternal wellbeing? Perhaps the thing for which you prayed would have filled your heart with vanity and pride. If the crosses and afflictions had been taken away from you, you might, perhaps, have forgotten your God, and neglected the salvation of your soul.

God has His good reasons if He does not comply with your wishes. You may be sure that He loves you more than you love yourself.

But even if that which you desire be good and salutary, God may delay to grant it. If God does not immediately satisfy your desires, He will make you better appreciate the value of His gifts; He will try your faith, exercise your patience, render you more humble, and your hearts more responsive to His graces. Complain not, have confidence, and continue to pray with due contrition for your sins, and with devotion, and God will surely hear you, because He wishes your true happiness in this world, and more so in the next. Amen.

## XX. The Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar

As the time of His Passion approached, Jesus Christ desired to celebrate once more with His apostles the Paschal meal prescribed by the law. "Now, as they were at the table, He took bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to His disciples with the words: 'Take ye and eat; this is My body'" (Matt. 26). In like manner He took wine, returned thanks, and gave it to them, saying: "Drink ye all of this, for this is My blood" (*Ibid.*) In this manner Jesus instituted the most holy Sacrament of the Eucharist, this holiest of Sacraments, in which He, in the words of the royal Prophet (Ps. cx, 4), "founded a remembrance of all His wonderful works."

And as this miracle was to be perpetuated in the Church, Jesus Christ gave to His apostles, and to all their successors, the priests, the authority to do as He had done, until the end of the world, by commanding them: "Do this for the commemoration of Me" (I. Cor. xi, 24).

I wish to say a few words about the sublimity of the Sacrament of the holy Eucharist, to remind you of the gratitude which we owe to Jesus Christ for this magnificent pledge of His infinite love.

The holy Eucharist is one of the seven Sacraments of the Catholic Church, and, as St. Thomas observes, the sublimest of them all. While in the other Sacraments we receive a share in the graces and merits of the Saviour, we receive in the holy Eucharist Jesus Christ Himself, the author of all graces. As the brook is produced by the spring, so is, in the words of St. Thomas, the holy Eucharist the wellspring of the graces dispensed by the other Sacraments; they are directed towards it as to their final purpose.

The royal Prophet foresaw how God the Father of Mercy, by preparing this heavenly Bread for us, would work the greatest of all His miracles (Ps. cx, 4). Our holy faith teaches us that by uttering the words of consecration, the priest changes the substance of the bread immediately into the Body of Christ, and the substance of the wine into His Blood. Of the bread and wine only the forms remain—the exterior appearances. Thus the only begotten Son of God, born of Mary the Virgin, is present really and substantially in the most holy Sacrament under both forms. Hence there is due to Jesus Christ in the holy Eucharist the same adoration that the angels and saints offer to Him in heaven—the adoration which all creatures owe to their God and Creator.

St. Ambrose remarks: "If the creation of the universe cost the almighty God only a word, only an act of the will, how can it be difficult for the same omnipotent word to change bread and wine into the Body and Blood of the Saviour, who, by virtue of His omnipresence, is enthroned gloriously in heaven, and at the same time present in the Sacrament of the altar (Lib. 4, de Sacr. c, 4).

St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, reminds that the eternal Father, by sending into the world His only begotten Son for the redemption of mankind, gave us in Him all the boundless riches of His heavenly treasures (Rom. viii, 32). When, therefore, Jesus Christ in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, gives Himself wholly to us, with His divinity and humanity, assuredly He can give us no more. Therefore the Angelical Teacher calls it justly the greatest of all miracles. Here shine in brightest radiance Divine omnipotence, mercy, wisdom, generosity, and, above all, God's infinite love. St. Augustine calls this divine Sacrament the sacred bond of love, for he who receives it with befitting preparation becomes united with Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ with Him. The Lord said: "He that

eateth my flesh, and drinketh My blood, abideth in Me, and I in him". (John vi, 57).

Our loving Saviour not only dwells amongst us until the end of the world, as He promised, but He is the compassionate Physician who heals our wounds, the Teacher who enlightens our understanding and strengthens it in the faith, the loving Shepherd, He who not only invites His faithful to His Table, but feeds them with His own Flesh and gives them to drink of His own Blood, so that they may be united most intimately with Him. How great, therefore, should be our appreciation for this infinite love! O, when we approach the holy Table, the very thought of the fact that Jesus Christ is present upon the altar should fill us with love, should incite us to offer up to our gracious Saviour our hearts, our inclinations, our wills; we should lament with David that we are so poor, and so little able to make return to Him for the magnitude of the gifts that He bestows upon us (Ps. cxv, 12).

And yet there are among Christians those whose faith is not strong, who are sadly indifferent to this miracle of divine love. Many allow month after month to pass without once approaching the eucharist banquet. They keep distant from the heavenly Physician, the divine Teacher, the good Shepherd. Jesus Christ tarries upon our altars, ready day and night to listen to our petitions; and daily the priests offer up upon the altars this sacrifice of expiation for the sins of mankind. But while the market-places are filled with people, and the meeting-places with gossipers and idlers, our churches are often deserted. Even many Christians give not a thought to Jesus, who longs for them to lavish upon them His gifts, of which they stand so greatly in need. And when the blessed Sacrament is exposed for public adoration, it often meets with indifference, irreverence, even contempt.

What greater insult, what baser ingratitude, could there be, dear brethren! Oh, if only the eyes of men's understanding were opened to make them realize in the blessed Sacrament the glorious miracle of Divine omnipotence, the source of all graces, the triumph of love, the pledge of salvation, God Himself, clothed in our flesh. Oh, let us unite ourselves with the angels of heaven in the praise and adoration of the Lord. Let us approach Him with pure hearts, with living faith, with burning love, to receive Him under the veil of the eucharistic forms as our own spiritual Food; let us live intimately united to Him, never to be separated from Him. Then we may hope to behold in heaven face to face His inexpressible beauty, and taste of that blessed fruit (Apoc. xi, 7) which He has promised to those who receive Him worthily at His own Table (John vi, 52). Amen.

## XXI. Preparation for the Reception of the Holy Eucharist

Holy Communion unites us most intimately with Jesus Christ, purifies us from venial sins and preserves us from mortal sins; it nourishes us, strengthens our souls in virtue, gives us the pledge of a glorious resurrection, and the expectancy of a blessed immortality. These are, dear brethren, the marvelous graces which Jesus Christ bestows upon the soul that worthily receives Him. Take care, therefore, to prepare yourselves properly before you partake of this Bread of angels; bear in mind how important the act is that you are undertaking, prepare a suitable dwelling in your hearts for God. Let us give our consideration to the preparation necessary worthily to receive the Sacrament of the holy Eucharist.

The Sacrament of the Eucharist is the most excellent and the most holy of all the Sacraments. We receive in it not merely graces, but the Author of all graces. This Sacrament requires therefore a greater sanctity, a more careful preparation, and demands this more indispensably than any other Sacrament. This preparation must include the body as well as the soul.

According to the law of the Church, one must receive the Sacrament of the holy Eucharist fasting. The Church exempts only the sick from this law. She allows them to communicate, even though not fasting, so that the Divine Commandment may be satisfied which enjoins that we receive the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ when in danger of death. The law of fasting requires that one should not partake either of food or drink before the reception of holy Communion. Any food or drink, even if partaken of thoughtlessly,

violates this law, and holy Communion cannot then be worthily received by those who are not dispensed.

It is required also that one approach the Lord's Table with a respectful and recollected demeanor. Under the form of the consecrated bread, our faith shows us Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Supreme Lord of the Universe, who invites us to the Sacred Banquet, who offers Himself to us, whom we are to receive into our hearts. And as we know that our divine Saviour is present in the holy Eucharist, truly, really and substantially, what more can be necessary to determine us to approach the Table of the Lord with holy reverence and with deep humility. To approach the holy Table with a demeanor suggesting indifference, vanity, or distraction, would bespeak laxity of faith and piety.

In order to communicate worthily, we must be in the state of sanctifying grace, free from mortal sin. The holy Eucharist is a Sacrament of the living, and requires in those who receive it the spiritual life. They only may approach the holy banquet who are well prepared and not stained with mortal sin. Sin-stained souls must first of all be cleansed in the salutary waters of penance.

Man is inclined to sin, and none of us can boast of entire freedom from sin. Examine your conscience well before you approach the holy Table, and if you find yourself guilty of mortal sin, remember that it is indispensably necessary to take refuge in the holy Sacrament of Penance, in order to purify yourself, as no amount of contrition will suffice without sacramental absolution. Remember that he who has the misfortune to communicate in the state of mortal sin commits a terrible sacrilege, and he eats and drinks his own damnation.

To draw from holy Communion all the fruits that it should and can produce in us, one not only must be free from mortal sin, but

also free from attachment even to venial sin. Those who are tepid and lax in their devotion may be nourished with the bread of angels, but they impede the operations of grace. They put an obstacle to them by the attachment of their hearts to their failings.

If you desire to communicate in a worthy manner, and draw from holy Communion abundant fruits, be sure and remove every obstacle, renounce every sin, however slight, make the firm resolution to resist with the aid of Divine grace all your evil inclinations, cleanse yourselves in the tribunal of Penance from everything, even the very least stains, and sanctify yourself by devotion and holy thought.

A great saint has stated that a single holy Communion suffices to make a soul truly holy. Prepare yourselves therefore worthily for the holy Food; use all your care in preparing your heart when approaching the sacred banquet. On the eve of your Communion day, so St. Francis of Sales advises, begin your preparation for this holy act by frequent uplifting of the heart with sighs of holy affection. Retire, if possible, sooner than ordinarily, so that in the morning you may the sooner rise to God. If you awaken at night, immediately fill your soul with pious thoughts, anoint your lips with prayers that will prepare your soul to receive its heavenly Bridegroom, who keeps vigil whilst you sleep, who bestirs Himself to impart to you His graces and gifts. Happy are we if we communicate well prepared. For then this divine Sacrament will impart to us the life of our divine Saviour: the life of virtue here below and life of glory in heaven. Amen.

## XXII. On the Unworthy Reception of Holy Communion

The gift which Jesus Christ bestows upon us in the august Sacrament of the holy Eucharist, being so great and magnificent, and the love that He manifests in becoming our food and drink, being so overwhelming and infinite, what human understanding can be capable of fully comprehening the monstrous ingratitude, the hideous sacrilege, committed by those who appear at the Lord's Table unworthy, and burdened with mortal sin? St. Paul says: "Whosoever communicates unworthily shall be guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord" (I. Cor. ii, 27). The perfect sanctity of Jesus Christ places Him in direct and absolute opposition to sin. Christ and sin are so opposed to one another that one cannot unworthily communicate without committing an abominable crime against God, without drawing down upon oneself the divine wrath. "What union," says the apostle, "could take place between light and darkness, between Christ and Belial?" (II. Cor. vi, 14, 15). And he says, furthermore: "Whosoever communicates unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself" (I. Cor. ii, 29). He who is guilty of such deed commits a sin that is by its very nature an enormous crime, a sin that begets dire consequences.

As regards the abomination of an unworthy Communion, we must keep in mind that by the reception of the Sacrament of the Altar the divine Person of Jesus Christ is taken into our body and soul, thus uniting Him most closely with ourselves. To receive Him when we are in the state of sin, would mean to compel Him to enter the most unworthy, the most undignified abode that could be offered

Him, compel Him to associate with sin, to enter the realm of the devil. Can we imagine a greater crime? If even the desecrator of some object, or of a person, consecrated to God commits a grievous sin, what must be said of those who desecrate the holy of holies Himself, the Body and Blood of the Redeemer?

The words of St. Paul, that such a person renders himself guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord, mean that the malice of this sin is no less than an assault upon the person of God, an attempt at the destruction of God. The holy Fathers, for this reason, rank the crime of an unworthy Communion with the crucifying of Christ. Indeed, they find in this crime more aggravating circumstances and greater malice than in the crucifixion. The Jews crucified Jesus without knowing Him. "Had they known Him," says St. Paul, "they would not have crucified Him" (I. Cor. ii, 8). They crucified Him in His mortal body, and in doing so they fulfilled, though unintentionally, the will and design of the divine Father. Those receiving holy Communion unworthily erect for Jesus Christ another cross, at a time when He reigns gloriously in heaven, and they know Him to be their true God. And this cross is not a cross of salvation, but a cross of condemnation for themselves, not desired but abhorred by God; not a glorification of Jesus Christ, but a wicked outrage against His sanctity. They would fasten Him to the cross at the very moment when He offers to dispense to them the most gracious, the most marvelous of benefits, when He desires to pour into their souls the treasures of His grace. Oh, what malice, what ingratitude, what faithlessness! Who, indeed, can adequately describe it! Truly do they who commit this sacrilege render themselves guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord.

If the horror of this sin is so great, what must the consequences be? The curse which an unworthy Communion draws after it, which

befalls the whole nature of this unfortunate person, can only bring with it most frightful consequences.

These punishments, not to mention the temporal ones, may appear in the form of spiritual blindness, hardness of heart, abandonment by God, and complete slavery of Satan. Then this person goes on from sin to sin, from crime to crime, until often final impenitence is the end. Such are the results of the sentence which he who becomes guilty of an unworthy and sacrilegious Communion draws down upon himself.

I do not say, nevertheless, that this sin is unpardonable, and that there is only despair left for him who is guilty of this crime. Since even among those who crucified the Saviour on Calvary there were some who, on account of their truly contrite disposition, found grace and salvation in the same Blood which they had so cruelly helped to shed, there is hope also for those who renew the Lord's crucifixion by an unworthy Communion, if they become truly sorry for their misdeed and, with true contrition, beseech God to be merciful.

Dear brethren, be on your guard against this great sin with all solicitude and have the greatest horror of it. Unfortunately there is often great temptation to fall into this sin. Be careful, therefore, to cleanse your souls by a sincere and contrite confession of your sins. May the Lord preserve you all from this great misfortune and its awful consequences. Amen.

## XXIII. Frequent Communion

Our divine Saviour, who dearly loved His disciples, and in their person all mankind, loved them indeed, as St. John expresses it, to the end, with an infinite love (John xiii, 2). When He gave to them and to us the most holy Sacrament of the Eucharist, He manifested in it the magnitude of His love. In this great Sacrament He offers us His most precious treasures: His Body, His Blood, His strength, His grace, His Life. If we fully appreciated the gift He bestows upon us, how eagerly we would strive to render ourselves worthy of this heavenly Bread. Dear brethren, God calls you all to this sacred banquet. What a blessing it would be if you would correspond readily to the urgent invitation, and frequently approach the Table of the Lord.

The reception of the Sacrament of the holy Eucharist is made an obligation for all of us by the command of our divine Saviour, who ordained: "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood, you shall not have life in you" (John vi, 54). This injunction renders Communion compulsory for all Catholics who have attained the use of reason, and the Church has confirmed this obligation by requiring every member of the Church to receive holy Communion at least once a year, at Paschal time. This commandment obliges under pain of mortal sin. But do they who communicate only at Easter correspond fully with the spirit of that commandment, and with the wish of Jesus Christ? Is it probable that Jesus Christ had in mind just one holy Communion a year, when He says: "With desire I have desired to eat this pasch with you before

I suffer" (Luke xxii, 15). Did He not add: "Take and eat, this is My Body; take and drink, this is My Blood. Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His Blood, you shall not have life in you"? Is it not actually indifference for the tender love of the Redeemer to remain away from His holy table all the rest of the long year? Do you not frustrate His intentions by complying so seldom with His loving invitation, and only yield to it under compulsion? If you love this God who is so lavish towards us, your love should frequently lead you to His Table, where He gives you His Blood and His Body, His Soul, His divinity and His humanity, where He gives Himself to you, desirous to overwhelm you with love and grace.

You may tell me that the Church, which God has given us to lead us in the path of salvation, orders one holy Communion for the year. Dear brethren, you who are parents, what do you, for instance, require and expect of your children? You expect that they not only obey your orders, but also that they observe your wishes and your advice. You are the children of the Church of Jesus Christ. You are aware that the Church urges and begs you to receive holy Communion frequently. The Church exhorts and implores you, with all her motherly love, to reverence the sacred mysteries with such great devotion and fervent love, that no urging will be necessary to bring you to the sacred Table, thus to be strengthened by this divine Food.

St. Cyprian says: "Let us ask God to give us daily this Bread that descended from heaven, so that we, ever united to Jesus Christ, may live in Him, abide in Him, and never suffer the misfortune of being separated from Him by the loss of sanctifying grace." If, therefore, you listen to the voice of God and of the Church, if you have faith and piety, and zeal for your salvation, you will not try and hunt for

idle excuses that you may offer for staying away from the sacred Table.

You may tell me: We would receive the Body of the Lord often, but our life is toilsome; it is taken up with work; we lack the time; we have too many cares. St. Augustine calls these cares of yours wearisome trivialities. God does not require you to neglect them, but on the other hand, you ought not to give them the preference when there is question of your sanctification, of your soul's welfare. And there is no more powerful help in all your afflictions and affairs than the frequent reception of holy Communion. Frequent Communion will make easier for you the fulfilling of your duties; it will aid you in living well, and a truly Christian life will render you inclined and worthy to often approach the Table of the Lord. Then you will not require much of your time, nor much of an effort, to prepare yourselves for the worthy reception of the most blessed Sacrament. The early Christians were fully as occupied with worldly affairs as you are. They could not afford to neglect the obligations of their calling, no more than you can. Nevertheless, they found time to hear holy Mass every day, to communicate daily, or at least very frequently. What they did you can do, if you have the necessary zeal.

Others, again, may say that which keeps us away from the holy Table is not our occupation, but fear of our unworthiness. An unworthy Communion is certainly a fearful crime. To approach the holy Table unworthily is a crime that appalls; but not to approach the same from voluntary neglect is an inexcusable fault. Is there no middle course between these two extremes? Yes, this means is at hand and easily discoverable. Flee mortal sin, renounce attachment to sin, be conscious of your frailty on account of which you so greatly stand in need of the divine assistance. Pray often and fer-

vently; place yourselves under the guidance of a zealous confessor, and then there need be no fear that you will ever communicate unworthily.

Beware also of the fear of men, of weakness of character, of cowardice. If you frequently receive the Body and Blood of Christ, be prepared to hear yourselves called sanctimonious, or bigoted. There are people in the world who make a business of criticising the actions of others, of censuring and ridiculing them. Who are they that censure you? Assuredly not pious Christians, nor really virtuous persons; these would praise and esteem you. Shall then the foolish talk of gossips be capable of keeping you away from holy Communion, of depriving you of so precious a treasure? For the sake of a silly "what will they say" do not deprive your soul of the heavenly Food which is so necessary for it. Do not expose yourself to the danger of losing the grace of God, and with it everlasting life. On your deathbed you will care exceedingly little about the opinion of men.

Let us meditate often upon the love of Jesus Christ for us. He has loved us even unto giving us His Body as our Food. Let us remember how priceless is the gift that the divine Saviour has given us in the most holy Sacrament of the Altar, where we receive the Bread of life, and the pledge of our immortality. Approach frequently this holy Table. The world with its foolish censure, the devil with his wicked suggestions, concupiscence with its temptations, all will oppose themselves to your good will. Pray to the Lord that He may vouchsafe to instil strength and fortitude abundantly into your soul, to overcome every obstacle, and to partake frequently and piously of His most sacred Flesh and Blood, in the holy Eucharist, so that we may remain in Him, and He in us, now and for all eternity. Amen.

## XXIV. The Mystery of the Resurrection

The mystery, which holy Church triumphantly celebrates to-day, is the glorious resurrection of our divine Saviour, a mystery which is the most positive proof of His divinity and of the truth of our holy religion. At dawn of the third day after the death of the divine Saviour, His glorified Soul left Limbo, and resumed in the grave His body to make it participate in His glory. Then Jesus Christ departed from the grave, without requiring the removal of the ponderous stone that sealed it. Thus the soldiers on guard did not become aware of His resurrection at the moment it occurred. They were made aware of it when the earth quaked and an angel descending from heaven rolled away the heavy stone from the tomb and seated himself upon it, a sight which threw the guards to the ground for very fright.

The resurrection of Christ is the foundation of our holy Religion, and it is so essentially its foundation that, as St. Paul says, "If Christ be not risen again, then is our faith in vain" (I. Cor. xv, 14). If Jesus Christ is truly the Son of God, then we must acknowledge that also the law He prescribed is true, that the mysteries which He revealed are true, that the Gospel is true which He proclaimed, that the Church and the Religion are true which He founded. All this could not be claimed without the proof of His divinity, and nothing proves the divinity of Jesus Christ more positively than His Resurrection from death. Of all miracles this is the plainest and most convincing. The raising of the dead is the greatest of all miracles, and of all awakenings from the dead the most miraculous is that of giving life back to one's self, by one's own power. No one but God

alone can say, as Jesus Christ said: "I have power to lay down my life, and power to take it up again" (John x, 18). Hence, His frequent reference to this miracle. He hardly ever spoke of His Passion without at the same time speaking of His Resurrection (Matt. xxi, 21).

And it was just this miracle that Jesus Christ specially referred to when His enemies challenged Him to give proof of His divinity. He might have referred to the numberless miracles that He performed daily before their eyes, giving sight to the blind, speech to the mute, hearing to the deaf, restoring health to the sick, and, in fact, He did refer to them occasionally (John v, 36). He proclaimed, however, in a special way, the miracle of His coming Resurrection as a fact which would impress the seal upon all His other miracles, as the really decisive proof of His divinity.

If, after this oft-repeated declaration, the prophecy of Jesus Christ had not been fulfilled, there should be lacking that direct and decisive proof which Jesus Christ promised in testimony of His divinity, we would even be justified in refusing belief in it. But since He really rose from the grave at the time appointed by Him, He proved that He is really what He represented Himself to be, the true Son of God, true God. There results, of necessity, from the Resurrection of Christ, the obligation to believe also in all the other articles of the faith He proclaimed.

Having seen how the Resurrection of Christ is the strongest foundation of our faith, let us consider how it forms also the support of our hope, the hope we cherish with regard to our own future resurrection. Adam's fall had inflicted great harm upon mankind, in soul as well as in body. In the soul, by depriving it of the spiritual life of sanctifying grace; in the body, by subjecting it to afflictions and to the law of death. This twofold injury the divine Saviour

came to repair, He, who was to come, as the Scripture says, in order to save that which was lost (Luke xix, 10). On Mount Calvary He delivered us from the death of the soul, by wiping out our sins with His Blood, and by re-awakening our souls to the life of grace. To replace us fully in the blissful state of grace as it prevailed before the fall, there was lacking only the deliverance from corporal death, and He did deliver us from the permanent dominion of death over the body at that happy moment when He stepped out from the tomb as the conqueror of death for Himself and for us. "In consequence of this mystery," says the apostle, "as we all died in the first earthly Adam, we shall all rise again in the second heavenly Adam, namely, in Jesus Christ" (Cor. xv, 22).

In this, our future resurrection, we must distinguish between that which is taught by our faith and that which is a matter of our hope. Faith tells us that all descendants of Adam will arise from the grave to a new life. But that our bodies may arise in glory, according to the image of the transfigured Body of Christ, this is the object of our hope.

We cannot think without a shudder of the complete destruction which death will work in our bodies. How great must therefore be our gratitude to Jesus Christ, who, through His glorious Resurrection, has given us a pledge that He will restore our bodies and reunite them to our souls according to the example of His glorious Body: incapable of suffering, full of glory and brightness (Phil. iii, 21). It was this hope which upheld the pious sufferer Job in the midst of his sufferings; this hope it was that encouraged the martyrs to deliver their bodies up to most frightful torments. Should this hope not be capable of inducing in us the small sacrifice necessary to conform ourselves to the conditions of our own glorious resurrection?

What are these conditions? In order to participate in the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ, it is, above all, necessary to share in His suffering; we must now bear within us the seal of the suffering Jesus, in order to bear later within us that of the glorified Jesus (Rom. viii, 17). Therefore we must crucify our flesh and its concupiscence; we must make of our bodies the instrument, not of sin, but of justice and sanctity. Only upon this condition shall we make certain our magnificent destiny, and take part in the blessed Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Vain will be our hope if we refuse to die to sin, if we pamper our bodies, satisfying their unbridled desires, indulging their sinful inclinations. Our bodies, it is true, will arise even then, but this resurrection will be a terrible one, because it will be for eternal ruin, for the torments of hell.

May the thought of our future blessed resurrection, which has its model in that of the Saviour's, encourage and incite us to walk in the fear of God, to hold our bodies in subjection to the spirit, to follow the path of Christian mortification. All this may prove hard to our nature, but in that important moment in which our souls will be re-united with our glorified bodies, Oh, how we shall bless these brief days of mortification and of vigilance. How happy we shall be in glancing at the little sufferings which we shall then hardly remember, but which have become the cause of our infinite happiness, and of eternal glory. Let us keep ever before our mind that great day which will surely come, in order that we may not be overcome by our refractory nature, but that we may use every means tending to assure us of our supreme spiritual and bodily blessedness. Amen.

## XXV. On Indulgences

The Incarnate Son of God, after His Resurrection, ascended into heaven, to enter into possession of the glory which, according to His humanity, He had acquired through His obedience to the heavenly Father. On earth He left His priests as His ministers and representatives, and as the dispensers of His graces and gifts. His priests have the power to consecrate and to bless; they have the authority to remit the guilt of sinners who, truly contrite, desire to be reconciled to God, and to distribute to the faithful the abundant treasure of indulgences, of which I shall speak to-day.

Through indulgences are remitted those punishments for sin which, after the sin has been forgiven, we still owe to the divine Justice in this or the coming life. The Sacrament of Penance wipes out our sins and also remits the eternal punishment, but it does not always, or not completely, remit temporal punishments incurred by sin. The sinner is left under the obligation of rendering satisfaction. Hence the Christian is obliged, by divine Law, to do works of charity, in order to render satisfaction to divine Justice for the offenses offered to it by his sins. The Church, which cherishes for us a truly motherly love, knows our weakness, and knows that we shall never be able, by our own unaided efforts, to pay in this world what we owe to divine Justice for our sins; she therefore comes to our aid and offers us a means to completely free ourselves from our guilt before God. This means is found in the use of indulgences, and we will now consider what are indulgences, and in what manner we may gain them.

In order to understand the character of indulgences, we must keep

in mind the article of faith which teaches the Communion of Saints. It teaches that all the faithful are united through baptism, through faith in Christ, and through sanctifying grace, so that all participate in the spiritual goods offered by the Church in the same manner, in the same way, as all members of the human body participate in its life and strength.

It is to be observed that our divine Redeemer, through His Passion and death, rendered satisfaction to the divine Justice for the sins of all men in so infinite a manner that His satisfaction far exceeds the guilt.

Again, the saints achieved and suffered far more than they personally owed to divine Justice as satisfaction. Every good work has a twofold value: that of satisfaction, and that of merit. It effaces punishment, and merits reward. The merit belongs wholly to the saints themselves, whereas the satisfaction rendered by their good works flows, to the extent of the part they do not need, into the treasury of the Church. Thus the satisfaction they rendered to God in excess of what they owed is stored, so to speak, for the benefit of those who still sojourn in this life. To this treasure belong therefore the great merits of saints who lived almost sinless lives, and the abundant merits of the blessed Virgin, who from the day of her Immaculate Conception was perfectly holy.

We see therefore that in addition to the infinite merits of Jesus Christ, in which we participate through the holy Sacraments and the holy Sacrifice, the Church possesses another boundless treasure, consisting of the works of satisfaction of the blessed Virgin and other saints. This grand treasury can never be exhausted, no matter how lavishly it may be distributed and made use of. It is inexhaustible, because the merits of Jesus Christ are infinite, and it is constantly added to by the good works of the just.

The legitimate distributor of this treasure is the Pope, as the representative of Jesus Christ, as the successor of Peter, to whom the divine Master confided the keys of heaven to exercise the power to bind and to loose, with the promise that whatsoever he loosed upon earth should be loosed also in heaven (Matt. xvi, 19).

The word "indulgence," therefore, means, in our case, the remission of temporal punishment which we must suffer for our sins either in this world or in purgatory. The indulgence is called plenary, if it remits all this punishment; and partial, if it remits only a part of it. A plenary indulgence grants full remission of all temporal punishment for sins which have already been effaced by the Sacrament of Penance, so that if we were to die at that moment, or thereafter commit no further sins, we should be received directly into heaven without spending even a moment in purgatory. A partial indulgence of, say seven, ten, twenty years, or of forty or one hundred days, means that those who gain it do not attain complete remission of temporal punishment, but only such remission which they might acquire from God by doing penance, with the severity of the early Christian era, within seven days or one hundred, or whatever the term way be.

The Church, however, does not grant this favor without cooperation on our part. She grants indulgences only to those who take pains to be reconciled to divine Justice, who have the true penitential spirit. She wishes to come to the assistance of our frailty, but not to induce sloth or idleness. "The Church," says St. Cyprian, "can only exercise clemency in favor of a true penitent who takes the trouble to make satisfaction for his sins." Indulgences are for the faithful a treasure of priceless value. Unfortunately, a large number of Christians trouble themselves not at all about indulgences, or at least use only slight effort in gaining them, fearing,

perhaps, that the plenary indulgence is too difficult to gain, which is by no means true.

The conditions required are: the Christian, at the moment in which he would gain the indulgence, must be in the state of sanctifying grace; and he must faithfully fulfil the works prescribed by the Church.

Concerning the first of these conditions, it is not difficult for the sinner to regain sanctifying grace through holy Confession. If, in fulfilling the works for gaining an indulgence, one should commit a venial sin, the indulgence would not include the remission of the temporal punishment due to this new sin, but the venial sin would not be an obstacle to the remission of the temporal punishment for mortal or venial sins already forgiven. But even in this case one can gain the indulgence fully and completely when the final one of the prescribed works is accompanied by an act of true contrition for all venial sins committed.

Concerning the second condition the prescribed works are Confession and Communion, and, usually, praying, fasting and almsgiving, and visiting the church; it is certainly not difficult to perform faithfully these simple works of piety.

Dear brethren, put aside this indifference with which, perhaps, many of you have heretofore been affected in the matter of indulgences. Make an effort, whilst there is still time, to gain the indulgences which the motherly solicitude of the Church proffers, so that you may escape the pains of purgatory, or at least shorten them. Remember that the torments of God's purifying fire surpass in severity the most painful martyrdom that one may suffer upon earth, and that you have in the indulgences an easy means of escaping this fire. Amen.

## XXVI. Reverence Due to the Church

Although God is present in all places, and though, therefore, every place is consecrated by His divine Presence, He has appointed some places exclusively for His service, and He distinguishes them by making them His special dwelling. These places are our churches, in which God dwells in a special manner, "The Lord is in His holy temple" (Ps. x, 5). He gave testimony of this fact at the consecration of the famous temple which King Solomon erected in God's honor. While the ceremonies were taking place there was seen a bright and shining cloud descending into the temple, impregnating the place with the majesty and glory of the Lord. Thus He took possession of His temple, as of His palace and special abiding place, so as to teach us that He would in like manner distinguish the places that henceforth man would dedicate to Him. In our churches, however, God is present in a much more marvelous and blessed way than even in the Temple of Jerusalem. He dwells in our churches by virtue of the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the holy Eucharist. Thus our churches are actually made the House of God, not only through the omnipresence of God, but also through the real presence of Christ in the holy Eucharist.

Hence you see how sacred our churches are, and what veneration and high esteem we owe to them.

For the better comprehension of the duties we owe to our churches, let us consider the intentions which God had when He selected them as His dwelling-places. These are chiefly two, and the first is the glorification of His holy Name (II. Par. vii, 16).

God is present everywhere, and thus He must be respected in every place; but in His churches He desires to be especially adored and glorified.

The second intention which God had in desiring that temples be built to Him was that of there imparting to us His graces. To be sure, the Lord exercises everywhere His goodness and mercy towards us, but the churches are the privileged places in which God manifests Himself and His grace in a most particular way. He wills that the throne of His glory should be at the same time the throne of His mercy, according to the promise which He made in the beginning to Solomon (II. Par. v, 15). And in fact everything in our churches speaks of the supreme goodness and mercy of the Lord. Do you not find here that fountain of spiritual life that freed you from the slavery of Satan and made you children of God? Do you not receive here the blessed Food of the divine Word, and the life-giving Food of the soul in the holy Eucharist, as also the forgiveness of our sins in the holy Sacrament of Penance? Here you find, moreover, the treasure of infinite graces in the holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and the superabundant fulness of gifts and benefits which your prayers bring down from on high. Hence the Church is called the house of prayer, not in the sense that one could or should not also pray in other places, but because our prayers here have a special force and blessing.

It is therefore easy to understand that we must comport ourselves in God's churches in a manner befitting the fact that we offer our veneration to God and expect to receive His mercy. Thoroughly penetrated with the thought of God's greatness, whose majesty holds forth in this sacred place, we must acknowledge His supreme Lordship, confess our utter dependence upon Him, and humbly cast ourselves down before Him, to unite our adoration with that of the

holy angels, who, in an invisible manner, surround the altar and reverently do homage to their Lord and God. Conscious of our helplessness and frailty, we must present our needs and cares to Him who alone can aid us. We must beg Him not to dismiss us from His throne of grace without granting us the graces that are the most needful and profitable for our spiritual and bodily welfare. To obtain all these, both interior and exterior recollection are required; interior, in order to direct our mind, our thoughts, our inclinations, our whole soul to God, to forget all other things, to occupy ourselves solely with Him; exterior, by silence of the tongue, modesty of the eyes, and a respectful attitude to help the interior recollection and to edify and stimulate those around us.

Let me ask now: Is this really the manner in which all Christians behave in church? Alas, many go there from habit; they enter there with a mind distracted by worldly matters; many, indeed, hardly take the trouble to converse with God. Their body is in church, but their mind is elsewhere. This is not worshiping God, and certainly not drawing His mercy down upon us.

But there are even worse abuses. Many persons go to church from curiosity; they go not to think of God and to pray to Him, but in order to see and be seen, or to show off their clothes—clothes that are sometimes not even modest. I do not have to prove that this is a grave abuse of the house of God and of the divine service.

Let us determine, dear brethren, always to observe the honor of the House of God. Let us, upon entering a church, manifest our faith, and with holy Jacob explain: "How terrible is this place; this is no other but the house of God, and the gate of heaven" (Gen. xxviii, 17). Our faith should inspire us with a wholesome fear, a holy awe, with interior recollection, devotion and humility. Women should be modest in dress; indeed, it is for them a strict obligation.

Remember that some day the holy Sacrifice of the Mass will be offered up here to petition God for the rest of your soul; how can you have confidence in this petition if your behavior in church during your lifetime has been such that, in the words of holy Scripture: "The stone shall cry out of the wall, and the timber that is between the joints of the building shall answer" (Ps. xxv, 8). May this thought restrain you from ever dishonoring this holy place; may it be to you an incentive to venerate the same befittingly as the place of sanctity and religion, of grace and salvation.

Our church, in which God dwells, in which He offers Himself upon our altars under the forms of Bread and Wine, is the House of God. God Himself has made the reverence towards His dwelling-place a strict precept. He has severely punished its desecration, as we see in the examples of the Kora, Dathan, and Abiram, of the Bethsamites, of Oza and of many others. Let us therefore avoid everything opposed to this reverence; let us always observe proper decorum in church, and manifest a lively and devout interest also for the suitable decoration of God's house, "the place where His glory dwelleth." Amen.

## XXVII. The Love of God

"Charity, says the Holy Ghost, is the end and completion of the law" (I. Tim. i, 5). They who have not charity are without merit in God's sight. "Charity," says St. Augustine, "it is that distinguishes the children of God from the children of evil." And St. Francis de Sales adds: "Virtue and perfection consist in charity, that is in the love of God." In short, charity comprises in itself all things. Salvation is pointed out by faith; hope prepares us for it; but it is attained only by charity. What, then, is charity? It is a supernatural virtue, by means of which we love God above all things, because He is infinitely amiable, and love our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God. It has for object God and our neighbor; it is both divine and brotherly. Let us then consider the love of God; why, and in what way, we must love Him.

The Lord is loved insufficiently by mankind because He is insufficiently known. If we fully realized that God is the Supreme Good, and the source of all happiness, we could not help loving Him. St. Bernard says: "The incentive to love God is God Himself." If we knew Him in the entire infinity of His perfections, we should exclaim with the archangel Michael: "Who is like unto God?" And who deserves to be loved like the Lord? God is the Supreme Being. He possesses all possible virtues in an infinite degree; He surpasses in beauty, magnificence and holiness everything that our created reason can imagine.

You love creatures; but did they not receive from God that which renders them amiable, and do they not all say plainly: It is God who

created us? What is really all the beauty and power of created things? Compared to God, truly, only a shadow. Again, lovable qualities in creatures are usually accompanied by failings, so that they can only please in certain respects. In God, however, everything is perfection, everything without blemish, without anything that might displease, everything incites us to love Him. God unites in Himself all perfections; He is the supreme Good. We must love Him, therefore, because He is in Himself infinitely lovable, because His goodness is an infinite treasure, whence we draw an abundance of graces and blessings.

God it is who brought us forth from nothing; His hands formed our body; His power created our soul, as the masterpiece of creation; by this soul, man, created to God's image, is raised above all visible creatures to the rank of a reasoning being. God it is who gave us life and who preserves it; His infinite goodness watches unremittingly over us and protects us. He ordered that all other creatures should serve for our use; He heaps innumerable benefits and gifts upon us. Whatever we are or possess, we have received from God. And yet, what is all this in comparison to that which this great God has vouchsafed to do for the eternal welfare of mankind?

In order to redeem us, dear brethren, in order to be loved by us, He bestowed Himself entirely upon us; He became man, left His heavenly throne to become as we are. Should not this proof of His great love suffice to win our hearts? Yet, to the loving heart of God even this was not enough. He even sacrificed Himself for us by the most cruel death, the death of the Cross. Can it indeed be possible to do more for us than this! Yes, the divine Redeemer found the way. He was not satisfied with offering Himself up once on Golgatha; He ordered that this adorable sacrifice should be re-

newed every day, to the end of time. He wished to remain forever with those whom He loved; until the end of the world He will be present in the Sacrament of His love, in the holy Eucharist upon our altars.

Dear brethren, ought we not to love our God, a God who for love of us died for us, who for the love of us abides in our midst to lavish upon us His graces? St. Paul hurled excommunication at those who do not love our Lord Jesus Christ (I. Cor. xvi, 22). Let them be anathema who refuse to God a love which He purchased at so great a price. Let them be anathema, who, though the Blood of a God is shed for them, remain unmoved. God forbid, dear brethren, that this curse should descend on any of us. Let us ardently love the Lord; let us dedicate to Him all the inclinations of our hearts, and may our love be at least such as God requires of us.

St. Francis de Sales describes in a few words the character of the true love of God. This love, says he, despite all our natural passions, must overshadow our love for anything else. God requires of us a love the most heartfelt. This love must dominate our whole heart, occupy our whole soul, master all our faculties, fill our whole mind, move our whole strength. We must love God with our whole heart, with our whole soul, with our whole mind. The rule which we must follow in our love of God is that of loving Him above everything. To God we must dedicate our heart, our inclinations, and prefer Him above all; prefer Him to the angels and saints in heaven, to parents, children, friends and benefactors; prefer Him to every kind of good, to the pleasures of this world, to our own welfare, to our health, even to our life. Thus we will allow our heart no inclination that we could not offer up to God, love nothing which is opposed to Him. He is our supreme Good, our last End. It would be folly to love anything more than God, or as much as

God. To love God above all things is a sacred duty, and if our love is not of this kind, then we are unworthy of God.

If you really love God, then with this love there must be combined the firm and sincere resolution to sacrifice everything, every happiness, to suffer pain and persecution, to sacrifice life and limb, to renounce every other inclination, every other love, rather than to do anything displeasing to God. Thus do those act who love the Lord as He should be loved. If you really love the Lord, you will gladly converse with Him, listen to His word, think of Him, and raise up your mind to Him whenever possible. For where your love is, there will your heart be and your thoughts" (Luke xii, 34). If you truly love God, you will render yourself more pleasing to Him by a pious and righteous life, by fidelity to His Commandments, by perseverance in the fulfilment of the duties of your state of life. The Holy Ghost says: "He that is just, let him be justified still" (Apoc. xxii, 11). "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. v, 48).

Again, if you truly love God, you will confide in Him; you will humbly accept the dispositions of His divine Providence, and say to yourselves: "God has promised to stand by us in our necessities, why, therefore, should I fear?" Nothing can happen without His permission; we know that He loves us tenderly. Let us therefore have courage and patience.

Dear brethren, do we love God in this manner? Has, in our timid hearts, the fear of men more sway than the love of God? Has indolence, attachment to that which is earthly, caused us to transgress His holy Commandments, to refuse Him the love we owe Him? If this is the case, do not remain in this unhappy state. For, "He that loveth not, abideth in death" (I. John iii, 14). Let us rise from this unhappy state; let us shake off the yoke of idleness,

conquer this lukewarmness, bewail our sins, do penance, and awaken love. Let us love this great, good, and lovable God, who has done so much for us and still does so much. Let us beg Him not to permit His divine love to be extinguished in our hearts, and to grant that it may ever burn therein and destroy the stain of sin. Then will our lives be a constant exercise of virtue, and we shall finally participate in the happiness of loving God eternally in heaven. Amen.

## XXVIII. The Love of Our Neighbor

We must love God because He alone is truly worthy of love, and because He comprises in Himself all perfections. We must love Him because He is the source of all good, because we have from Him all that we are, all that we possess. But it is not enough to love God; we must love our neighbor, because God wills us to do so. The Gospel combines the love of God and the love of our neighbor, and teaches that in these two Commandments is contained the whole law. It teaches that these two precepts of love are fundamentally but one, and declares that it is impossible to love God truly if we do not love our neighbor. The love which we should cherish for our neighbor is contained in the love which we owe to God; and the love of God, when it abounds in our hearts, embraces our fellow men. The love of our neighbor must therefore have its source and its aim in the love of God; the exercise of the one is proof of the presence of the other. Let us therefore consider to-day the love of our neighbor, which by divine Commandment should dwell in our hearts, and let us consider the manner in which we are to fulfil this important commandment.

Who is our neighbor? Our neighbor is, in general, every human being, because all, like ourselves, are created after the image of God, and were ransomed with the precious Blood of Jesus Christ. The word "neighbor," in the Gospel, embraces all men without exception, without distinction, whether of this or of another country and race, whether enlightened by the light of the true faith, or still

dwelling in the darkness of error. Whether Jew or pagan, friend or foe, yes, even those that hate and persecute us. Charity must be universal; it must be catholic, like our faith. If we refuse our charity even to a single person, even to our own and God's greatest enemy, then we have not the virtue of Christian charity. We must love all mankind, because all are children of the same God, because the Lord has redeemed all and bestows upon all His gifts and benefits. The rain falleth upon the good and the bad, the sun shines for the good and for the bad. This is the will of our Father, who is in heaven.

We must love men, because they all, like ourselves, came forth from the creating hand of God; because they, as we, have received from God a soul, upon which God has impressed His image, because they, like ourselves, have been redeemed by the Blood of the Incarnate Son of God, shed upon the Cross for the salvation of all mankind, and, like ourselves, they are called to life eternal, and are given divine assistance to attain the same. We must love all men, because we form with them a single community, one family. Do we not wish ourselves to be loved by all men? It is proper, therefore, that in return we should love all men, so that we may gain the love of all. We must love our neighbor. This law is written in ineffaceable letters in our heart. And lest we pay little heed to the voice of the heart, Jesus Christ has made it a positive commandment when he said: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you" (John xiii, 34). Furthermore, our divine Saviour did not simply proclaim the duty of brotherly love, He even was our model in the fulfilment of this duty. If we read the life of our Saviour, if we carefully study His actions while in this world, we may learn how to love our neighbor from this divine model. Jesus passed His life upon earth in doing good. In

performing His miracles, in dispensing His graces, He made no distinction among men. His blessings were bestowed without discrimination upon the great and small, the rich and the poor, just and sinner. For all men He came down upon earth, for all He suffered, for them all He shed His Blood and died upon the Cross.

I say, therefore, with the apostle: "I consider it superfluous to exhort you to the practise of charity towards your brethren. You have learned to love one another by directing your aim to the example which your divine Redeemer has given you." Therefore, dear brethren, do not place a restriction upon the love of your neighbor; do not confine it to a few privileged and chosen persons. Remember that you must even love your enemies, because they, too, are your neighbors. You must walk in the footsteps of the Incarnate God, who prayed even for His executioners. Our love must be without bounds; it must be universal.

How, then, must we practise the love of all mankind? First of all we must love our neighbor for the love of God. Brotherly love must not have its only origin and motive in the attractive qualities and relations which certain persons possess for us. No; we must love our neighbor because God has so ordained; because He Himself loves our fellow man and destines him for heaven; because man is God's image. Be he adorned with virtues or disfigured by vices, possessed of accomplishments and qualities that attract us, or burdened with failings and faults that displease us, whether he brings us advantages or causes us harm, he must have a part in our love. This, and this alone, is the virtue of Christian charity, loving our neighbor truly and sincerely, loving him for the love of God.

But God does not wish that we content ourselves merely with the sentiment of charity. We must also practise the love of our neigh-

bor by wishing him all the good that we may lawfully wish ourselves, by taking pains to procure for him the good that we may wish for ourselves. St. Augustine says upon this subject: "He who loves His neighbor as himself wishes him all the good that he desires for himself, and seeks to procure for him those advantages that he would procure for himself, were he able to do so. The evil which he fears for himself, he will not cause others, but treat each one as he would wish to be treated himself." What are your wishes for yourselves? You wish to have your errors and failings pardoned, to be consoled in your sufferings, advised in your doubts, to have a helping hand extended to you in misfortune and trouble. This is what you desire for yourselves. Then treat your neighbor in the same way. You are displeased, and it pains you, if you are the victim of unkindness and injustice, if your good name is tarnished by calumny, if your actions are falsely interpreted. Do not, therefore, be guilty of an offense against your neighbor which you would so much fear for yourself. If you love your neighbor with true Christian charity, you will not harm your neighbor by word or deed.

What a happy world this would be, dear brethren, if Christian charity reigned here supreme. The charity and generosity of the wealthy would afford assistance to those in unhappiness and misery. Envy, avarice, hatred, anger would be unknown. Men would sincerely wish one another every good, and never harm any one either in body, reputation, or possession. Through charity we should all be one heart and one soul; sweetest harmony would reign supreme. God's holy law, the law of love, would be perfectly observed, and after the brief space of this earthly life we all would attain the joy of eternal happiness which God has prepared for those who have loved according to His holy Will. But though this blessed state of things does not prevail, it is nevertheless the duty of every one to

use his best effort in the observance of this divine law. Whatever others may do contrary to this law gives us no permission to fall short in its requirements. We must do our duty and exercise charity, if we desire, in the hour of our death, to find charity when we shall be summoned before the judgment seat of God. Amen.

## XXIX. The Commandments of the Church

Holy Church was established by Jesus Christ to be our Mother, and Teacher, and our infallible guide in faith as well as in morals. We owe her, therefore, veneration, respect, submission, and obedience. "We cannot have God for our Father," says St. Augustine, "if we have not the Church for our Mother." The reverence which we owe God is inseparable from the reverence which we must show the Church. And in order to attain eternal happiness, it is necessary to observe the commandments of the Church no less than the Commandments of God. Nevertheless, there are some Christians inclined to pay little heed to these commandments. They transgress them without much scruple, more particularly those that concern fasting and abstinence. I will prove, therefore, that the Church has the power to give laws, and that we are strictly obliged to observe them, so that you may properly realize their importance and necessity.

The spiritual body of Christ, that is, the community of all believing Christians of which the Church on earth consists, is, like any other community, an assemblage and association of persons. Like any other community, nation, monarchy, or republic, the community of the Church requires officials to guide it, to govern it, to rule it, because no community can thrive without officials, who, with the aid of appropriate laws, provide for its welfare, preserve proper order, and prevent corruption; so, too, the Church of Jesus Christ must be so governed. Christ founded His Church as a kingdom, a visible society. This society, this kingdom, must be ruled under the supervision of a visible executive head; it must have officers to

guide it until the end of the world. Christ gave it this head and these officers in the persons of His apostles and of their successors, and He gave them the authority to provide for the welfare of the faithful, which includes the obligation on the part of the faithful to be submissive and obedient to these officers. "He that heareth you," said Jesus Christ, as He bestowed upon them this authority, "heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth Me" (Luke x, 16). And, again, He said: "And if he will not hear the Church, not submit to its judgments and ordinances, let him be to thee as the heathen and the publican" (Matt. xviii, 17).

By virtue of this authority the Church exercises two different offices towards the faithful: the teaching and the governing office. She teaches, by putting before the faithful the truths which they are required to believe; she governs them by devising rules and commandments, the observance of which becomes obligatory for them. Hence it follows that the faithful owe to the Church a twofold obedience: that of the reason and that of the heart. They owe her the obedience of reason, to hold as true everything which she presents to them to be believed. Every article of faith which we hold as true, we believe upon the authority of the divine Word, and of divine Revelation, but it remains the privilege of the Church alone to explain, without error, what truths are revealed by God and are to be believed. We owe, furthermore, the obedience of the heart, practical obedience, by which we carry out what she enjoins upon us as precepts for our mode of life. As she received from God the authority to teach us, so the power is likewise granted her to regulate our lives and morals, to prescribe laws and commandments as the guide for our actions.

There are some Christians who, seeking an excuse to ignore these commandments with an appearance of justification, do not hesitate

to claim that these commandments are the work of man, and not found either in the Decalogue or in the Gospel. With far more reason these persons might oppose all State laws and violate them with impunity. What does it matter that these laws are not directly given by God, if withal they are the work of a legitimate authority, instituted and founded by God? Is this not sufficient to render them of obligation to us, to impose upon us the strict duty of fulfilling them? We cannot, therefore, transgress the commandments of the Church without at the same time violating the commandments of divine Law, because God enjoins upon us the duty to obey the Church, and gives us plainly to understand that contempt of her laws is contempt of God.

Moreover, let it be observed that the sins committed by transgressing the commandments of the Church are generally sins that proceed from indifference and unbelief, and for this reason are evidence of lack of faith, or even malicious opposition to the Church. As a matter of fact, the commandments of the Church are easily observed, unless the matter which they forbid is in an individual person the object of a strong sinful inclination.

Since the chief proof of our love and veneration for our holy religion is the fidelity with which we observe its commands, the true and pious Christian will rejoice in a faithful obedience to the laws of the Church, and he will find this obedience a powerful assistance in fulfilling the Commands of God.

The precepts which the Church gives us impose no additional burden upon us; on the contrary, they grant us practical assistance in leading a good life. They make it easy for us to fulfil the obligations which God Himself has imposed upon us, and they provide the ways and means of fulfilling these obligations.

Let us, then, lend a willing ear to the voice of the Church, and to

the precepts which she gives us in God's stead, and let us fulfil them willingly and conscientiously. Let us remember the many and great obligations which we have towards this loving Mother for all that she has done for us, for all that she still is doing, and will do for us until the day of our death. She has regenerated us to a new life in the waters of holy Baptism; she confirmed us in grace in the Sacrament of Confirmation; she enables us to receive all the gifts of grace, for the dispensing of which she was instituted by Christ. She invites us to the tribunal of penance to cleanse us from our sins; she urges us with gentle force to go to the Lord's Table, there to feed and strengthen us with celestial Food: she appoints ministers to teach us, to guide and advise us, and she unceasingly aids us in our endeavors by her continuous prayer to God. At the end of our lives, when every human help will be unavailing, she redoubles her loving solicitude and hastens like a tender mother to our bedside, fortifies us for the important step into the life beyond by the holy Viaticum and Extreme Unction, commends us fervently to the mercy of God, and implores the Blessed Virgin and all the angels and saints to come to our assistance. And even after our death she pays honor to our bodies as temples of the Holy Ghost, as a sacred possession confided to her, and accelerates by her intercession for our souls our entrance into the kingdom of heaven, if this should be delayed by any guilt still unexpiated.

Since, then, the Church treats us like a true Mother, and is ever solicitous for our welfare, should we not behave towards her like truly good children? Our affection and our gratitude towards her should specially consist in the observance of her commandments.. What she requires of us is what Jesus Christ asked of His apostles: "If you love Me, keep My Commandments" (John xiv, 15).

Let us, therefore, at all times, show affection, reverence and

obedience to our Mother, the Church. Let us be careful not to despise her ordinances, nor her servants. Unfortunately, this contempt is a mark of the times in which we live, and it is a sure sign of impiety and unbelief, and of a corruption of morals. The more the Church is assailed and reviled by the impious, the more we, as true Christians, should love and honor her and comply faithfully with the laws and precepts which she, as the guardian appointed by God for the government of His Church on earth, gives us. Amen.

## XXX. The Ascension

As the glorious Resurrection of Christ was the beginning of His triumph, so was His miraculous Ascension into heaven its consummation. By His Resurrection the Lord conquered death and put His enemies to confusion. He revealed to them His power, His immensity, His divinity. He made glorious His Name, which the envy of His enemies had reviled. As the first human body to rise from death to an immortal life, it remained for Him to open the portals of heaven to mortal man, to whom up to that time they had been shut. This consummation of His triumph He reserved for the day upon which, after making arrangements for the founding of His Church, He ascended into heaven, to take possession of His throne at the right hand of the Father. Let us now consider the reasons for the glorious Ascension of Jesus Christ, and the fruits which we may draw from this sublime fact.

By His Ascension, Jesus Christ first of all gave us a distant view of the glory of His kingdom; He wished to impress upon us the immensity of the reward which He has promised to us, and which awaits us above. The Jews expected a Messias who would come and set up a worldly kingdom; they misinterpreted the holy Scriptures, because their minds and hearts were set upon worldly desires for power and splendor. They desired a Messias who would set up His throne in Jerusalem, who would extend the kingdom of Israel by conquest, and would give it freedom, power, and abundance. This erroneous opinion of the earthly kingdom of the Messias so generally

prevailed that even those who called themselves Christ's adherents were not free from it. The Jews would not acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Messias, because they beheld in Him not power and domination, but humility, poverty, and abasement; and even after His glorious Resurrection, His disciples had not relinquished this false impression (Acts i, 6).

Hence it was necessary to remove this error, and to show them that the kingdom of Christ was very different from that which they had imagined to themselves, and which they had hitherto awaited in vain. And in order to make this truth plain and impressive, He assembled upon Mount Olivet His apostles and disciples, forty days after His Resurrection, and before their eyes He rose miraculously from the earth and ascended into heaven. What stronger proof could He give them of the truth that His realm was not a material one, not one of this world, but a spiritual and heavenly one. When they had, with their own eyes, seen Him leave this earth and ascend to heaven, their ideas of the founding of a worldly kingdom must have been finally dissipated; they must at last have become convinced that the longed for kingdom would be established in heaven.

Furthermore, as He had so often promised that all those who did the will of His heavenly Father would surely be received into His heavenly kingdom, He desired to ascend to heaven with great solemnity, in order not only to give them the right idea of His kingdom, but also to confirm the truth of His promise. By ascending to heaven as our Redeemer and Brother, He gave us to understand that He went in our name, to take possession of that blessed inheritance. Hence St. Paul tells us so confidently that we who have received the spirit of adoption, and having been made the children of God, are also heirs of heaven, and co-heirs of Jesus Christ (Rom. 8). The divine Saviour made this plain when He said to His disciples, and

through them to all the faithful: "I go to prepare a place for you, and when I have prepared a place for you I will come again, and will take you to myself, that where I am you also may be" (John xiv, 2, 3). Since, therefore, He ascended into heaven, and dwells there in His glory, it follows that heaven is the place prepared for us, and that we are destined to be united to Him in heaven. By His glorious ascension into heaven He gave us a positive pledge of our own future glorification. For this reason the Ascension of Christ should fill us with joy, and we ought to give fervent thanks to Jesus Christ for this consoling revelation.

Finally, Christ ascended into heaven to continue there His office of High Priest for us, to be our advocate with the Father. He had made His sacrifice and shed His Blood upon the Cross, and now He went to offer His sacrifice to the Father in heaven. He went to remind the divine Father unceasingly of His sacred Humanity, of the Blood that He shed, of the Body that He offered up, of the death that He suffered for us, to implore for us mercy and salvation. He offers to the heavenly Father the tremendous purchase price of our Redemption, and as our Mediator He presents our necessities and comes to our assistance in all things. What encouragement for us, dear brethren, to know that we have in heaven such a Protector and High Priest. We are in truth all sinners, and the number of our failings is great indeed. But we should not on that account despair, says St. John, because we have an advocate with the Father: "Jesus Christ the just, not only for our sins, but for those of the whole world" (I. John ii, 1-2).

These are the loving intentions which Jesus Christ had in making His Ascension. He went to prepare for us above a dwelling-place; He took possession of that blessed abode for us, and promised us that heaven is to be our rest, our reward, our happiness. Hence

all our desires should be directed not to earthly things, but to heaven. If hitherto our thoughts and inclinations have been unduly directed towards that which is of the earth, we must now turn them heavenward. Here on earth we have no enduring abode; we were created and destined for a blessed home in the other world, to be the brethren of saints and angels of God. How great, indeed, would be our folly if we placed more value upon earthly than upon heavenly things, if we should so cherish this wretched place of exile as to forget our heavenly home; if we preferred this miserable existence to the exalted rights of citizens in the realm of eternal blessedness.

In His solicitude for our salvation, Jesus Christ ceases not to exercise in heaven the office of High Priest, Advocate and Mediator; He cares for our needs and inclines the divine ear toward our prayers. This truth should encourage us to take refuge at the throne of grace, so that through His mediation we may attain mercy and strength; it should enkindle in our hearts the liveliest sentiments of gratitude. It should fill us with glowing love, so that, united most intimately with Him and living in Him, we may exclaim with the apostles: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation? or distress? or famine? or danger? or persecution? or the sword? But in all these things we overcome, because of Him that hath loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor might, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. viii, 35-38).

Since the love that Jesus Christ bears for us is so great and infinite, what could be more just and reasonable than that we should show Him in return our own sincere gratitude, our own fervent love? Rightly, therefore, the apostle hurls anathema at those who

love not Jesus Christ (I. Cor. xvi, 22), because they manifest a monstrous ingratitude.

Oh, let us learn to love Jesus Christ for all that He has done on earth for us, and still does for us in heaven. This is the fire of divine Love which He brought into this world (Luke xii, 49), and for the enkindling of which He has sent the Holy Ghost. This is the fire of love which unites us with Him, which will cause us here below to live in His Spirit, and which will finally secure for us a share in His glory in heaven. Amen.

## XXXI. The Gifts of the Holy Ghost

The great event which the Church commemorates to-day is the mysterious descent of the Holy Ghost upon the apostles, which worked in them a wonderful transformation. Their former weakness was changed into fortitude, their failings into virtues, and they were made models of the most exalted sanctity. Filled with wisdom, courage and strength for the fulfilment of their calling, they traversed the world to proclaim the heavenly doctrine, to conquer heresies, to smother sinful passions, to destroy the worship of idols, to renew the face of the earth, to seal, eventually, the truth of their divine doctrine with their blood.

The mystery which we celebrate belongs not to this one day, it is embodied in the Church of Christ, and will continue to the end of the world. Not alone to the disciples was the Holy Spirit promised, no, we all participate in this glorious possession, if we render ourselves worthy of it. The Holy Ghost descends upon all the faithful who prepare themselves for His reception, and though this is no longer worked in a visible manner, as in the case of the apostles, it is accomplished in an invisible manner by the bestowing of His gifts.

The gifts which the Holy Ghost infuses into the souls of the just are, as holy Scripture (Ps. xii, 2, etc.) teaches us, the gifts of wisdom, of understanding, of counsel, of fortitude, of knowledge, of piety, and of the fear of the Lord. The sanctification of mankind hangs on two hinges: the avoidance of evil, and the practise of good works (Ps. xxxvi, 28). And as ignorance, concupiscence, the attractions of the world, and the suggestion of the devil incite us to evil, and

restrain us from doing good, the gifts of the Holy Ghost enable us in a special manner to conquer ignorance, to bridle concupiscence, to unmask the illusions of the world, and to recognize the pitfalls of the arch enemy, thus clearing for us the road to salvation. Hence St. Bernard says that we receive the Holy Spirit as a pledge of the inheritance of heaven, as strength for our hearts, and as a shining light for our understanding.

Through the gift of wisdom the Holy Ghost instils in us a high esteem for the things of eternity, and a profound contempt for the vanities of the world. With its assistance we overcome the aversion which in consequence of our corrupt nature we feel for things spiritual and we are induced to renounce undue solicitude for the goods of the world and their pleasures. Through this gift of wisdom we obtain a foretaste of the joys of heaven.

Our frail reason may lead to doubt about the mysteries of our holy faith, and such doubts are a cause of unrest, of disobedience to the commands of our religion, of indifference and reluctance in doing our duty. The Holy Spirit comes to our assistance with the gift of understanding; He dispels obscurity, allays fear, and fortifies us in serving God with joyous zeal, by inspiring us with the knowledge of those mysteries, which, without the light of this gift, we could not understand nor appreciate.

Again, numerous are the perils endangering salvation that overtake us suddenly, without giving us time to reflect upon the measures calculated to ward them off. The Holy Spirit enables us by His gift of counsel to overcome temptations, to persevere in the path of righteousness.

Misfortune and adversity are common enough in this life, and very difficult to bear with due confidence in God's Providence; often they furnish strong temptation for sin. The Holy Ghost grants

through the gift of fortitude firmness and endurance, and the resolution rather to suffer temporal than eternal loss. Of this we have an example in the holy martyrs, who steadfastly endured most frightful torments because the gift of fortitude had made their hearts unconquerable.

Through the gift of knowledge the Holy Ghost makes us perceive that we are mortal and perishable, and He teaches us to mistrust ourselves and to place our entire hope in God.

The Holy Spirit, furthermore, softens our hearts by the gift of piety, helping us to become zealous in prayer and in the doing of good works. This gift makes us charitable with our neighbor for the sake of God, in the remembrance that we are all children of the same heavenly Father, ransomed by the same precious Blood of Jesus Christ, and destined for the same glory in heaven.

Let us always remember that it is impossible for us to do good without the holy fear of God. As sin results from vain complacency and proud confidence in ourselves, so the wholesome fear of God with which the Holy Ghost inspires us is the source of all virtue. Blessed are they who fear the Lord; for, zealously endeavoring not to offend God, not to incur His displeasure, the soul takes pains to live in accordance with the divine Will, and to observe faithfully the Lord's Commandments.

With the aid of these seven gifts of the Holy Ghost we are enabled to shield ourselves from all evil, may it come from ourselves, from the deceitful world, or from the craftiness of the devil. They make a virtuous life easy for us, and preserve us in justice and sanctity. Without these gifts we are feeble in virtue and inclined to evil. Without them it is even impossible for us to work out our salvation, because, as the Apostle teaches, only those can be children of God, and heirs of His kingdom, who follow the guidance of the Holy

Spirit (Rom. viii, 14). Let us therefore wash away our sins with the tears of penance and contrition. Let us approach the holy Sacraments with a profound humility, with a living faith and firm hope, so that we may attain the love, the sanctifying grace, in which these precious gifts are included. And after securing possession of the divine Grace, and of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, let us be careful never to lose them. A simple mortal sin suffices to lose the friendship of God and all the graces of the Holy Ghost.

A life in mortal sin is the greatest of all evils. Great is the sinner's misfortune who, abandoned to his ignorance, depravity and weakness, and without protection from the snares of the devil, exposed to the temptations of the world, either does not know what he must do to save himself, or, knowing it, has not the strength to do it. Great is his danger of eternal perdition. Great, on the other hand, is the happiness of the just in possession of the Holy Spirit. Although surrounded by the dangers and temptations of this life, he can exclaim with David: "For though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evils, for Thou art with me." Amen. (Ps. xxii, 4.)

## XXXII. Hypocrisy

It is without doubt iniquitous to an atrocious degree for one to boast of his viciousness and to glory in his impiety, to pride himself on his profligacy. It is likewise reprehensible for one to pretend to be virtuous when he really and secretly abandons himself to an infamous and lawless conduct. Those who vaunt their unbelief and immorality are no doubt most blameworthy; but equally disreputable is the hypocrite who puts on the appearance of the guileless lamb, whilst inwardly he has the instinct of the wolf. Against such, John the Baptist cried out: "Ye offspring of vipers, who hath showed you to flee from the wrath to come?" (Luke iii, 7). And Jesus Christ denounced them with the words: "You serpents, generation of vipers, how will you escape the judgment of hell?" (Matt. iii, 7). That you may be imbued with a profound detestation of the infamous vice of hypocrisy, I will try and show you how wretched the life of a hypocrite is, how all his evil intentions must miscarry, and that shame and disgrace will await him at the judgment-seat of God.

Hypocrisy is the dissimulation whereby a person seeks to appear better than he really is. Hypocrisy is always sinful, and grievously so when one uses a righteous appearance to further his sinister and sinful aims. Of this kind of hypocrisy we shall speak first. And here first mention must be given to the malice of heretical teachers, who boast of piety and zeal for the honor of God, only to attract an audience, and to induce the acceptance of their false doctrines. Then there is the knavery of some persons who give themselves the

appearance of virtue, in order that they may more easily indulge their sinful passions, those who manage to gain a reputation for honesty and sincerity, that they may unrightfully appropriate the property of others. These are the wolves, the serpents and vipers of which the Lord speaks, and against whom it is difficult to guard, because they are clothed in the guise of meekness and rectitude.

Whatever their object and aim, it is obvious that hypocrites condemn themselves by their actions to a life of unrest and worry. What effort and care must not a vicious person exercise to appear as righteous and God-fearing. If addicted to avarice, he forces himself to give occasional alms, to spread the belief that he is charitable. If a slave to impurity, he must be constantly on his guard before others, in order not to tarnish the reputation for morality that he seeks. If he uses the appearance of piety, he must, against his inclination, go to church, join in prayer, and perform other works of piety, to accomplish his base purpose.

Thus the hypocrite is constantly engaged in a struggle against his inclinations, and he has not even the consolation of securing lasting benefit from his strenuous efforts. St. Bernard calls such persons martyrs for the devil's sake, who merit the curse of God instead of reward.

And after all, the hypocrite cannot thoroughly succeed in gaining a good reputation, or of maintaining it long. The strain he undergoes to appear in a virtuous light is too great, and sooner or later he will show his true colors.

Now, dear brethren, while I have pictured to you the worst kind of hypocrisy, namely, the kind that uses piety and virtue as a cloak and a means for evil purposes, there are many Christians guilty of a lesser degree of hypocrisy, those, namely, who for appearance's sake practise their religious duties, but put little or no restraint on them-

selves when away from the church; those, also, who have two sets of manners and tempers, one for society, and the other for the home. The man who charms society with his amiableness, but who is a tyrant in his home; the woman who wins the admiration of acquaintances by gentleness and modesty, but who makes those of her household smart under her bad temper, and who loves to gossip and slander; the young people who are proud of their correct behavior in the sight of the world, but who secretly entertain dangerous companionships and expose themselves to temptation; all these are guilty of hypocrisy in greater or less degree.

"There are too many Christians in name only," exclaims St. Augustine, "outwardly they are good, but inwardly their hearts are wicked and abominable." They go to Confession without a lasting conversion, they listen to sermons without amending their lives. The churches are filled with the faithful, but in the case of many their faith and their virtue do not seem to accompany them when they leave the church.

Let us endeavor, therefore, not only to appear virtuous, but to be so in reality. If Holy Writ reminds us with such great earnestness and so impressively that even lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, must this not in greater extent be the fact with our actions, with our conduct?

May the all-merciful God graciously preserve us all from the misfortune of losing our eternal salvation through a life of hypocrisy. Amen.

## XXXIII. The Church

Without faith, says St. Paul, it is impossible to please God (Heb. xi, 6). This faith is not merely a matter of belief, it must be proved by the practise of good works, performed in accordance with the divine Will. Without works of faith it is impossible to attain eternal salvation. Hence it is necessary for us to ascertain whether we have the true faith, and also whether we really live our lives according to the teaching of Jesus Christ.

God, who demands faith, has also furnished the means by which we may be guided in seeking the true faith. This means is adapted to the understanding of all mankind, learned or not. Let us consider this means, which furnishes certain guidance to attain to the glory of heaven.

Is this means—given us to ascertain what God requires of us—the private study of the Bible? No, decidedly not; because a very large number of persons possess neither the time nor the ability for so serious a study. Many are not even able to read. Furthermore, we have in the numerous sects of Protestants an illustration of the fact that the Bible may be interpreted in many different ways.

Again, is the instruction of wise and learned men that means? No, this cannot be a safe means, seeing how learned men differ from one another upon the most important points of faith and doctrine.

Can possibly the direct and personal enlightenment by the Holy Spirit be the means, as some Protestants assert? Certainly not. Behold the many various beliefs among these same Protestants. The Holy Ghost is a Spirit of truth, because He is God; He can there-

fore teach only one truth. These Protestants, however, are not in accord with one another, each sect has different and contradictory doctrines. Hence it is not the Holy Ghost who guides these sects, because there can be only one truth.

What means have we then to recognize the true faith, and the true teaching of Christ? Behold, dear brethren, the Church, founded by Jesus Christ, the God of truth, she alone is the true guide, appointed as such by our divine Saviour Himself. And as no church that could err, would be fit to instruct us in the faith and in the true doctrine of Christ, the Church, therefore, which the divine Redeemer founded upon earth is not capable of error. Let me explain this truth in a few words, and let us, first of all, consider what this venerable Church of Christ is and represents.

When the apostles began to preach the gospel, there were those who accepted their holy teaching in every particular. But there were also those who accepted some truths but taught that other truths should be rejected. These were schismatics, or heretics. As soon as the apostles became aware of these heretics, they implored them to renounce their errors, and when they refused the apostles excluded them from their communion. To the holy community of the Christians, namely the Church of Christ, belonged only the true believers, only those who accepted the teaching, wholly and completely, as taught by the apostles.

Our divine Saviour ordained that in the Church some should be superiors, and they are the bishops, others again were to be their assistants, and these are the priests. This intention is manifested in the appointment of the twelve apostles who were the first bishops, and the seventy-two disciples whom the Lord sent forth to preach the gospel, without, however, giving them the authority with which He equipped the apostles.

The Redeemer willed, furthermore, that amongst the bishops there should be one above all the others, and he should be invested with the supreme power to be His representative, the visible head, the supreme shepherd, the supreme pastor of His Church. This exalted dignity our divine Saviour conferred upon St. Peter. He announced this before His crucifixion with the words: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church" (Matt. xvi, 18). He fulfilled this promise, when, after His Resurrection, He said to this same apostle: "Feed My lambs, feed My sheep."

The Church, the guardian of the faith, is therefore the community of all baptized believers who are united by the profession of the same faith, by the participation in the same Sacraments, and in the obedience to the lawful pastors, particularly to their head, the Pope. This Church, notwithstanding the fierce onslaughts of wicked men, and of hell itself, will continue to exist until the end of the world, and until that time it is her mission to be the guide of mankind upon the ways of truth and sanctity. She would go to destruction if she could fall into error. Jesus Christ can never permit this, because His Church must be the true Church, and must infallibly teach the truth.

The Saviour said to the prince of the apostles: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it, nor the power and might of the devil and his adherents" (Matt. xvi, 18). Yet it would mean the devil's victory if the Church would fall into error. From that moment the Church would cease to be the communion of all having the true faith; she would cease to be the Church of truth, the Church of Christ.

When the Pope, as supreme shepherd and ruler of the Church, proclaims a universally binding doctrine regarding faith and morals, he cannot err, for Christ has said: "Behold, I am with you all days,

even to the consummation of the world" (Matt. xxviii, 20). Christ will be with the Church, not at certain times, but for all time; not for a period, but unto the end of the world. God is with the Church, leads her by the hand, as it were. It is impossible, consequently, that she should ever fall into error. The Church cannot err, because the divine Saviour said to His apostles, and to their lawful successors: "I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Paraclete, that he may abide with you forever. The Paraclete, the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My Name, he will teach you all things, and bring all things to your mind, whatsoever I shall have said to you" (John xiv, 16, 17, 26). The Holy Ghost, therefore, was to stay forever with the apostles upon earth. He was to remain with them until the end of the world. Since the apostles, however, were only to live a short number of years, the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of truth, was therefore to remain also with their successors, the Pope and the bishops, and teach them all truth. Hence the Church cannot possibly be led into error, because the Holy Spirit is ever present within her, to enlighten, to instruct, and to guide her.

Jesus Christ promised His Church that His assistance and that of the Holy Spirit would forever preserve her from error. She will therefore possess the truth for all times. This is the crown which the divine Saviour placed upon His Spouse, and it will never be taken away from her. For this reason St. Paul calls the Church "the pillar and ground of truth" (I. Tim. iii, 15). He who clings to this pillar will never be led into error.

Dear brethren, let us thank the Lord every day of our lives for the most precious gift of faith that we have received from His goodness. We are born and brought up in the true Church of Jesus Christ. Oh, let us listen attentively and with love to the instructions which she gives us, because they are the infallible truth. Let

us adhere firmly to this immutable pillar, and let us open our minds to these truths which the holy Church teaches us, and our hearts to the precepts which she imparts to us by Divine commission, so that we, walking in the light of truth and doing good works, may reach heaven and enjoy that recompense which God holds in readiness for His faithful children. Amen.

## XXXIV. The True Church of Christ

In the world there are many sects, religions and creeds, and the Jew, the Mohammedan, the Baptist, the Presbyterian, and the rest, each one claims his religion to be the true one. Each condemns as false the other creeds; the belief and religious practises of each are in opposition one to another. Yet truth can be but one, as God only is one; it is consequently impossible that all, or even two opposed creeds, can be true. There can be only one true religion, only one true Church of Christ.

How are we then to find the true Church in this bewildering throng of religious bodies One thing is certain, and that is: God could not leave us in ignorance in a matter of such great moment, a matter involving nothing less than our eternal welfare. The way that leads to salvation must be open to all; it must be one that each man may see and know. And so it is. The Lord has willed that His Church, like a city built upon the pinnacle of a mountain, should be visible and be manifest to the whole world, and He provided it with such evident marks that men of every condition are enabled to see it, and to distinguish it from false churches. The marks of the true Church are that she must be *one, holy, Catholic* and *apostolic,* and as these marks are alone found in the Roman Catholic Church, she alone is the true Church of Jesus Christ. Let me further explain this.

The true Church of Christ must be one; one in her faith, one in her communion, one in her constitution, one in her head. And this is the fact with our Church. She is one in faith. Although spread

over the whole world, all her communities hold in every particular the same faith. Though her gospel is preached in many different languages, the truths proclaimed are the same. And so has it been ever since her foundation, and will ever be. Ask a Catholic in any part of the wide world, call from the grave a Catholic from any of the centuries that have passed since the founding of the Church; and this Catholic from the distant islands of the Pacific, or from Iceland, this Catholic who lived before or after the Reformation, each will profess the same apostolic creed that you and I profess. The Roman Catholic Church is one in her belief, and while she has occasionally more clearly defined some particular dogma which was assailed by her enemies, she has never changed in the truths she has taught.

The Roman Catholic Church is one also in her communion and constitution. All her children are subject to the Supreme Head, partake of the same Sacraments, join in the same sacrifice, the same prayers, the same divine worship. In order to preserve this supernatural community, Jesus Christ gave to the Church a constitution which makes her an active and perfectly governed body. In every diocese there is a bishop who has for his assistants the priests, and over all the bishops is placed the Pope, as the representative of Christ on earth. The laity are joined in communities under leadership of their pastors, the communities are joined into dioceses under their bishops, and all the dioceses together form the Church, under the leadership of the Pope.

The Pope is the representative of Jesus Christ, so that through the Pope the Church and all her faithful are directly linked with God. Thus there is one single flock, under one single shepherd (John x, 16). And this is the perfect unity of the Catholic Church.

How different from our holy Church is the situation in which the

sects separated from our Church find themselves. I am not speaking here of infidels. Since they do not profess Jesus Christ, they cannot of course be one with Him. I speak of the sects that, though they call themselves Christians, are in opposition to our Church, and are commonly called Protestants. There is among them no unity because they do not hold the same belief. They cannot have unity in belief, for they acknowledge no supreme head, no supreme authority, no infallible teaching office. Each sect, in fact almost each individual Protestant, follows his own opinion and forms his belief according to his lights. Hence in each of the many sects there are almost as many opinions on matters of faith as there are individuals.

The true religion of Jesus Christ, furthermore, must be holy. Jesus Christ died, says St. Paul, in order to found a Church without spot and without wrinkle. Our Roman Catholic Church is holy in her invisible head, Jesus Christ, holy in her teaching and in her precepts, holy in her Sacraments and religious exercises, holy in her commandments and in her aims, holy in her saints, and holy, finally, in her faithful and obedient children. Our Church, therefore, is holy, and she alone can be holy.

The sects separated from our Church cannot be holy; they have not Jesus Christ for their founder, nor have they the successors of the holy apostles for their heads. Their founders have been far from holy, and therefore could not endow them with holiness.

The true Church of Christ must also be Catholic, which means universal. Truth is but one, it is the same at all times, in all places. That which is true here, is true everywhere, and what is true to-day will be true to-morrow and for all time. The Church, as the truth revealed to the world, must therefore be universal, existing at all times, since her foundation by Christ, and in all places, since she is the Church of God. Our Church teaches the truths which were re-

vealed to our first parents, handed down by the patriarchs, defined by the law of Moses, proclaimed by the gospel of Jesus Christ, and spread abroad by the apostles and their successors throughout the world. These same truths will be proclaimed, unaltered, until the end of the world, because the Church will exist as long as the world, and her faith will be the true faith of the human race for all times. She is Catholic, or universal, also as regards place. She invites every man, she enters the entire world and embraces all nations. Everywhere, and at all times, the same creed, the same holy sacrifice, are found within her fold.

Not so with the sects separated from our Church. They are not Catholic, or universal. They are not universal in regard to place or to time. There was a time since the death of our Lord when they were not in existence, and in regard to place, many of them are the official religions of some particular State, and not much known beyond its borders.

Finally, the true Church of Christ must be apostolic. The divine Saviour confided the revealed truths to His apostles for the salvation of the world. To them he gave the commission to preach the same throughout the world. From the apostles, therefore, whom the Holy Spirit designates as the pillars and foundation of the Church (Apoc. xxi, 14), the true Church must descend. And this is the case with our Roman Catholic Church. She is apostolic, because the apostles commissioned by Christ established her and were her first shepherds. We can prove the succession of our bishops from the times of the apostles. We have in the Holy See of Rome the lawful successor of St. Peter. His doctrine is that received from the apostles. Hence the Roman Catholic Church is the apostolic Church, the Church of Jesus Christ, the only true Church.

That the Protestant sects cannot claim apostolic origin is evident.

Yes, dear brethren, the true Church founded by the Redeemer of the world, propagated by His apostles, and confirmed by the blood of martyrs, is our Roman Catholic Church, the only Church that is truly one, holy, Catholic and apostolic. In her alone has the Lord deposited the treasure of truth revealed to the world; deposited the treasures of grace which sanctifies souls, effects their salvation and leads them to heaven. She is the Church which the Supreme Pastor, the Son of God, alone acknowledges as His, the Church in which the graces of the redemption merited by Christ are applied to mankind at all times without restriction. We must seek our salvation in her alone, for only in the field in which the treasure is buried (Matt. xiii, 44) can it be found, in another I seek in vain. He who preaches another gospel than that announced by the apostles, even if he were an angel from heaven, he is anathema, says St. Paul, and to him who is an adherent of this other gospel, that ends in the flesh after beginning in the spirit, Christ will avail nothing, rather he will lose Christ (Gal. v, 2-4).

Let us therefore praise the Lord, and thank Him fervently for having preferred and elected us to be born in the bosom of His holy Church. Let us ever love this holy Church, this faithful Spouse of Jesus Christ; let us obey her voice, it is the voice of God. She will then lead us after the brief conflict of this earthly life to the eternal triumphs of heaven. **Amen.**

## XXXV. The Necessity of Being Instructed in Our Religion

The infinite mercy of God has granted us the inestimable grace of belonging to His Church and of being numbered among her children. For this great blessing we owe Him deepest gratitude, and we should employ all efforts to gain the salvation for which our holy Church offers us the means. We should put this important matter above all other interests, and in all our actions have it constantly in mind. "For what doth it profit a man," warns the Lord, "if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Matt. xvi, 26). Hence the necessity of employing all means needful for our salvation. The first of these is, no doubt, a sufficient instruction in the knowledge of our religion, in Christian doctrine.

To know our holy religion means to know God as much as this is possible to us, to know what God has done for us, and what we must do for Him. It means to know His Will, to know the end for which we were created, the eternal reward which He has in store for us, the means necessary for this reward, the way to pray and to make good use of the Sacraments. Briefly, it means to know what we must believe, and do, in order to be saved.

That it is of obligation for the Christian to employ all diligence and zeal to acquire so profitable, so necessary a knowledge, should need no explanation. It is an obligation which God enjoins upon us, and one which our own interests demand. And yet this obligation is often neglected. Let us, therefore, consider the necessity of this knowledge and the great detriment which its neglect produces in the world.

First of all, faith is so necessary that without it, as the apostle says, it is impossible to please God (Heb. xi, 6). In order to acquire faith, we must listen to the preaching of the divine truths: "for," the apostle adds, "how shall they believe him, of whom they have not heard?" (Rom. x, 14). It follows that we cannot have a knowledge of the faith unless the divine truths are explained to us, unless we are instructed in them.

A knowledge of our religion is necessary also that we may know how to pray. Prayer is as indispensable for the Christian as is grace. Without grace we can do nothing by way of merit for heaven. But to obtain it from God we must pray for it. "Ask," says Jesus Christ, "and it shall be given you" (Matt. vii, 7). Therefore we must pray and must know what we should pray for.

The knowledge of religion teaches us, furthermore, how we may make good use of the Sacraments. They are the sources and channels through which the divine graces flow. They are, in the terms of the Council of Trent, the means whereby every true grace and justice is communicated to us, by which we increase the same if we possess them, and recover them if we have lost them. Hence the necessity for every Christian to know the nature and effect of the Sacraments, as well as the conditions for receiving them worthily.

Finally, the knowledge of religion teaches us to recognize the will of God as it is declared in His commandments, the observance of which is indispensably necessary to salvation. As a servant cannot properly serve a master whose will he does not know, so neither can a Christian properly do the Will of God if he does not know God's commands. Hence the necessity of being instructed in the divine Law and of knowing what God has enjoined and prohibited.

Bear in mind, dear brethren, that the little catechism taught to children suffices for that age, but of adults more knowledge is re-

quired. The rudiments of our religion are the seed, as it were, deposited in the youthful mind, not that it may remain in the same state, but that it may develop and grow, ripen and bear fruit. As we increase in age and ability, we must in proportion penetrate more deeply in the knowledge of the truths of religion; we should never imagine that we understand enough about it. As a matter of fact, the contrary condition often prevails. Many people regard religious instruction as a matter only for children. Instead of seeking to become better instructed, they often forget even the rudiments taught them in their early youth, and as a result become indifferent and ignorant.

Hence the deplorable fact that there are not a few Catholics so oblivious of what concerns their religion. They may be well versed in the knowledge of worldly affairs, but as to the important mysteries of our faith and their religious obligations, they are wofully in the dark. Small wonder, then, if such people end by dropping their religion altogether.

The complaint of parents about waywardness of children is in these days universal. Many of these parents should rather complain about themselves, because they have allowed their offspring to grow up in ignorance of their religion, and without Christian education. What other result can such parents expect?

To ignorance in divine things the Holy Spirit ascribes the awful deluge of sin and crime that inundates the earth (Osee iv, 2). It is true the mind may sometimes be enlightened and yet the will perverted and morals bad, but never can the will be righteous and the morals good if the mind is obscured in the matter of right and wrong.

These facts and the grievous errors that are the consequence of the neglect of instruction in our holy religion, demonstrate sufficiently the necessity of being well instructed about things spiritual, the

affairs of the soul and of eternal salvation. If we properly appreciate the special grace by which God has placed us in His holy Church, and has given us the means to obtain everlasting happiness, we shall take care that this grace shall not be rendered fruitless. Let us seek to correspond zealously with the loving intentions which God has for us. And as it is impossible for us to fulfil our duties if we know not what God requires of us, then let our first cooperation with the divine intentions consist in instructing ourselves well in the truths of salvation, in making use of those means which God in His goodness has placed for us in His holy Church. Let us go frequently to the holy tribunal of Penance; let us approach with great devotion and reverence the banquet of the holy Eucharist, which the Lord in His mercy has bequeathed to us to fortify us on our earthly pilgrimage. Let us seek, in the first place, the kingdom of God and His justice, remembering the Saviour's promise that all else will be given unto us, and let us take care not to be counted amongst those of whom the Psalmist says: "They have slept their sleep, and all the men of riches have found nothing in their hands" (Ps. lxxv, 6). "Because thou sayest, 'I am rich, and made wealthy, and I have need of nothing'; and thou knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Apoc. iii, 17). Amen.

## XXXVI. Pride

The pernicious character of the sin of pride may be realized from the fact that the corruption of human nature is the result of it; nay, more, hell was created in the first place to punish this sin, and the proud rebellious angels were its first inhabitants. There is no failing so distasteful to the nature of man as pride. One blushes when accused of it, and every one seeks to give proof that he is free from it. Pride is abominable also in God's sight, and calls forth His wrath more than any other sin.

What, then, is pride? It is the inordinate desire of one's exaltation, which causes a person to be unduly gratified with himself and his abilities, to consider himself of great consequence, and to desire that others should also so esteem him. In the original sense honor and distinction belong to God alone. He alone is admirable and perfect. But in a lesser sense man may participate in honor, in one of three ways, namely: in natural qualities, in rank, and in grace. Such natural qualities are knowledge, talent, bodily strength, health, and charm. Rank may mean wealth, positions of honor, or achievements. Grace, finally refers to virtue, probity, piety, and other supernatural qualities. To cherish these possessions in regard to God, to acknowledge that they come from Him, and to feel ourselves impelled on their account to love and serve Him better, without claiming for ourselves on their account a superiority over others: this is right and proper. On the contrary, to ascribe these possessions to ourselves and not to God, to boast and rejoice in them as if they were completely the fruit of our own merits, and thus to esteem

ourselves more than others, and to exalt ourselves unbecomingly above them; this is an inordinate love of our distinction, this is pride.

In pride we must distinguish two distinct degrees signified in the words of St. Paul: "And what hast thou that thou hast not received? And if thou hast received, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" (I. Cor. iv, 7). The first degree of pride consists in this: that we ascribe to our efforts that which is a gift of God. By this we deny to God the essential quality of being the author and dispenser of all good, and this is manifestly opposed to faith. Ordinarily, however, pride does not go so far. People possess usually the other degree, and whilst they admit that everything good is given by God without any merit of our own, they are so greatly taken with themselves and their abilities as if they really were entirely the fruits of their own merits. This is the pride which is so often apparent, and which is so repugnant, and to this refers the second part of St. Paul's reproach: "And if thou hast received, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?"

To realize better the malice of this sin, as also the marks by which it may be known, let us cast a glance at the evil results that arise from pride. We may truly say that pride is the source of every sin, in so far as sin is a rebellion against God, a refusal of submission to Him. But we will restrict ourselves here to the direct consequences of pride, and the first of these is the passion for glory, the desire to make known to others our abilities for our own exaltation. People practise good works with the sole intent of being esteemed and praised, they seek nothing but the praise and applause of others. This is the detestable vice of the Pharisees which Jesus Christ condemned in the severest manner.

Another result of pride is inordinate ambition, the morbid desire

for honors and distinctions. The favorable opinion which the proud person cherishes of himself and of his supposed merits, engenders in him the passionate desire of being exalted, of increasing in importance and influence, of playing a conspicuous part in the world. This state of mind is the source of jealousy and hatred towards rivals and competitors, of presumption in considering one's self capable of all things, which often leads to injury of public and private interests.

Another fruit of pride is contempt for others. For the more one strives to elevate himself, the more he seeks to depreciate the qualities of others. Hence envy at the good fortune and merits of others, hence malicious calumnies and other unjust means to gain one's end and to defeat others.

Revenge and enmity also find their root in pride. Even the slightest offense makes pride burst into flame. Since it believes that all sorts of respect and consideration are its due, it is embittered against those who are remiss in this respect. Thus arise contentions and enmities, more particularly so because the proud make it a point never to yield.

Another distressing consequence is stubbornness and obduracy of mind and will. Pride will accept only the conclusions suited to its prejudice; it will resist the truth, if not in harmony with its conceit. Pride suffers no contradiction, admits no error. Hence discord, quarrels, and disagreements injurious to the love of one's neighbor. The proud dislike submission to lawful authority. This engenders disobedience and rebellion. Submission and obedience are generally regarded by the proud as weakness and cowardice.

Much might yet be said about the evil consequences of this pernicious passion, but that which has been quoted suffices to describe the character of this detestable sin, and to make you understand why it is placed at the head of the capital sins.

We see that the proud forms of himself, and of his real or supposed good qualities, an idol, and attributes to himself the honor which belongs only to God. Therefore this sin is directly opposed to the first of God's commandments, in which God demands that He be acknowledged as the author, as the cause and source of all good, and that all glory belongs to Him. The proud seek their own and not the glory of God, which manifestly is an insult to the supreme sovereignty of God and a crime against God, and calls down upon the proud the divine wrath and the severest chastisements.

My brethren, take care to keep yourselves free from pride, from self-sufficiency, and the passion for self-glorification, all of which challenge the wrath of God. If divine Providence has vouchsafed to favor you in the way of wealth, talents, or other worldly advantages, let them be an incentive for gratitude and love towards God who has been so generous towards you, though you, perhaps, are more unworthy of His blessings than others; do not, by any means, let these privileges induce in you vanity or disdain.

In humility we have the antidote for pride. The virtue of humility is the indispensable foundation for all Christian perfection and sanctity. Let us be humble and thus follow in the footsteps of our model Jesus Christ, thus we may confidently hope after this brief life to be exalted by Him to everlasting glory. Amen.

## XXXVII. Humility

The emotions of the human heart, dear brethren, may be likened to the waves of the sea, and these waves of the heart are lashed by the tempest of pride into a fury which threatens disaster. Human power cannot calm this storm; it can be calmed only by the divine word. Harken to the word of Him who bade the tempest subside: "Learn of Me," says He, "for I am meek and humble of heart" (Matt. xi, 29). Turn to Him, and you will dominate the stormy waves of your flustered heart, "you will find rest for your souls" (*Ibid.*).

Dear brethren, humility is the sole foundation of virtue, because it is the only means to conquer our passions and to lead us to God. Unhappily this virtue is little known, and still less practised, and hence we see the sinful inclinations gain the upper hand and lead to sin and crime.

Many people have a wrong idea about humility. They understand by humility some certain exterior formalities, which are sometimes very far from the virtue itself; indeed, they are often the disguise for sinful pride. To assume the appearance of not caring for honors and distinctions, of being courteous and submissive, of yielding the first place to others, speaking of one's self with reticence, such things pass often for acts of humility, and they are so, in fact, if they have their root in the consciousness of our own lowliness, and if we really seek to humble ourselves. If, however, such action has for its aim the applause and admiration of others, then it is not the fruit of humility, but pride. "Many," says St. Jerome, "have the

appearance of humility, but few possess true humility of mind and heart." There are others, again, who bear humility only on their tongue. They confess to believe in their shortcomings, but let some one else repeat to their face what they thus say of themselves, and you will see how sensitive they are, how angry they become. They are just shamming the virtue of humility, and are far from being humble at heart.

Humility should have its foundation in our inner life. It is that virtue by which we are made aware of our abjectness and of our nothingness, by which we are induced to despise ourselves, and not to seek undue distinction in our own eyes or in the eyes of others. Two things are essential to the virtue of humility, namely, the knowledge of our shortcomings, and the humble opinion of ourselves we must draw therefrom. To realize our abjectness is no great trouble; we have merely to regard ourselves impartially and honestly. All those qualities upon which we so like to pride ourselves are either entirely imagined or at least not possessed by us to the extent that we would like to believe. But even if we possess them, they are not our property. "For if any man think himself to be something, whereas he is nothing, he deceiveth himself" (Gal. vi, 3). In fact, we are nothing, in the order of nature or of grace. We are nothing in the order of nature, because everything comes to us from God. From Him we have our being, and whatever advantages we have of birth, wealth, talent, or other desirable qualities of mind and body. If we would discriminate between that which is really our own, and that which belongs to God, then on our part we shall find nothing but misuse of the divine gifts, and graces, and base ingratitude. In the order of grace we are nothing, because our virtues, merits, and good works are gifts of God, without whose assistance we are not even capable of a good or meritorious thought

before God. What reason can we have, therefore, to be proud, when of ourselves we possess nothing but ignorance, malice, weakness and sin; when even the clay of the earth, of which we are formed, is God's creation and property.

The comprehension of these truths engenders in us self-contempt and depreciation of ourselves, and in this consists the true spirit of humility. And this humility produces in us most precious fruits, because it puts us in the right position towards God, our neighbor, and ourselves.

In the first place, it determines our relation towards God, because it makes us realize that we really are his subjects, and in all things dependent upon Him. It causes us to mistrust ourselves, and to feel how greatly we stand in need of God's constant aid. From this conviction there will arise in us noble sentiments, acts of piety, profound reverence for the divine Majesty, willing submission to the dispensations of the divine Will, sincere gratitude for God's benefactions, devout prayer in all our needs, and lively contrition for our sins. The humble alone are true worshipers of God.

Humility also improves our conduct towards our neighbor. It causes us to see in our fellow men only the good which they possess, and to judge them accordingly. Hence the humble are not overbearing; they consider the good qualities in others, and do not refuse them the honor due them. They regard their neighbor's actions in a favorable light, and are sincerely charitable towards their failings and weaknesses. The spirit of humility fosters affection and kindness in the home, and charity and forbearance in dealing with inferiors. Only the humble truly love their neighbor.

Finally, humility regulates our attitude in regard to ourselves. It suppresses in us self-love and self-seeking, causes us to realize our unworthiness of every gift and grace, to disdain praise and

distinction, and to profit by every opportunity to humble ourselves with the single intention of pleasing God.

Doubtless you understand now how necessary humility is. The world makes little of this virtue, regards it as suited only to the cloister and religious life. A grave error, dear brethren. This virtue is necessary for all, as necessary as it is that all should seek salvation. Humility is the basis of all virtues, the source of all graces, and the indispensable condition of salvation.

Humility is the foundation of all virtues. Without virtue we cannot save our souls. Without humility, however, there is no true virtue. Virtues consist not in outward acts, but before all in the spirit which they engender and foster; and when this is not the spirit of humility, but that of pride, then they cease to be virtues. They are then virtues only in the eyes of the world, but not in God's sight.

Humility is the source of all graces. Without grace we cannot be saved. Grace, however, is promised by God to the humble only (Ps. ci, 18; I. Pet. v, 5). To the humble He imparts graces abundantly, because He knows that He places them in the hands of faithful servants, who do not presume upon that which they receive, but refer all to Him, give the glory of all things to Him. But the proud who only seek to elevate themselves are abased by God. They are an abomination unto Him.

Finally, humility is the necessary condition for salvation. Jesus Christ requires this virtue from all in the plainest and most positive utterances. "Unless you be converted," He says, "and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. xviii, 3). The reason of this is because there can be no salvation for us unless we become like unto Him. He, who is the sum of all perfections, desired to be chiefly distinguished through this

virtue. His whole life on earth, from the very first to the last moment, was a continual practice of humility and of profound abasement.

If we have at heart, therefore, our sanctification and salvation, we must make humility the foundation of our efforts. I do not deny that the attainment of this virtue is difficult, on account of the resistance of our self-love and of our pride. We ought to ask God daily for this virtue, nourish it by the constant consideration of our lowliness, our unworthiness and imperfections, and always avail ourselves of opportunities to practise humility. Amen.

## XXXVIII. The Duties of Children Towards Their Parents. I.

God, who demands that we love Him more than all else, desires that we should love our neighbor for the love of Him. If we have this brotherly love which, indeed, is inseparable from the love of God, it is a proof that we have also the love of God. Since of all our fellow men, father and mother are nearest to us, God has in a special way impressed upon us the fact that we have duties towards our parents, and He laid down this law: "Honor thy father and thy mother that thou mayest be long-lived upon the land" (Exod. xx, 12). This commandment is placed at the head of the laws concerning the love of our neighbor, to make us understand that, as the worship of God is the most important requirement of the love of God, so the love of parents is the most important of our duties toward our fellow men, and that, after the veneration which belongs to Him, God desires nothing so much as the veneration which children owe to their parents.

The expression, "Honor thy father and thy mother," embraces all obligations of children towards their parents. There are three elements in this obligation, namely: reverence, obedience, assistance, and these correspond to the three benefits which we received from parents, namely: life, education, and support.

We must cherish respect for our parents because, after God, we owe our existence and life to them; we must show them obedience, because we have to thank them for their care in bringing us up, in training us in virtue and knowledge; we must render them assist-

ance, because they supported us when we were helplessly dependent upon their care.

The reverence which we owe our father and mother is twofold: interior and exterior. We practise the former when we realize in our heart the esteem due them, if we affectionately love them, and charitably excuse any faults which we may discover in them.

The exterior reverence due to parents is practised by avoiding with care every word that is disrespectful, harsh, unkind or offensive, and by speaking to them in a modest, kindly, and respectful tone. Severe words that may be excusable in dealing with others may become an outrage and grave sin if used towards one's parents.

Reverence manifests itself also in actions, by refraining from impatience and contradiction, and by consulting parents in matters of importance, in accordance with the teaching of the Holy Spirit: "Children, hear the judgment of your Father, and so do that you may be saved" (Ecclus. iii, 2).

"Honor thy father, in work and word, and all patience," says the Holy Spirit (Ecclus. iii, 9). These words condemn all those excuses which are often made for the lack of respect for parents, excuses such as those that parents are ill-tempered, troublesome, unreasonable, that they are exacting and cease not to scold. Even if this be so, one is not excused from showing parents the respect due them. The Lord requires that you should bear with their faults and failings. The fulfilling of this command will be all the more meritorious the greater effort is imposed upon you by circumstances. Great patience must be exercised by you, especially if such frailties of parents are the result of old age, of bodily infirmities, or other such causes. Special mention is made of this by the Holy Spirit, when He adds to the words above mentioned: "Son, support the old age of thy father, and grieve him not in his life. And if his understand-

ing fail, have patience with him, and despise him not when thou art in thy strength" (Ecclus. iii, 14, 15). And what could be more just than this. Our parents have patiently and faithfully borne with the trouble and worry of bringing us up, and should we not bear patiently with their infirmities when they are aged and worn out by working for us?

The second duty towards parents is obedience. "Children, obey your parents," says St. Paul (Ephes. vi, 1). Whether their commands suit your wishes or not, obey them. Obey in important and unimportant matters. In Holy Writ this commandment is frequently repeated, so that you may know how much God insists on obedience and submission to parents. Even when it is a question of receiving reprimand or chastisement, children must obey and not resist. The Holy Spirit Himself assures us that it is for our best interests and of great advantage to be reproved and punished (Prov. xiii, 24; xxiii, 13, 14; Eccl. xxx, 1). God even tells us that parents gravely sin who let the children's wrongdoing go unpunished.

This obedience should extend to all times and all ages; it ought not to be restricted to the years of childhood. Of course the manner of exercising parental authority accommodates itself to the age of the children. Yet it is true that children of every age owe submission and obedience to parents. This obedience must be cheerful and prompt. We must obey without inquiring the reason why the order is given. It must be cheerful and ready obedience, without inward discontent, without defiance and murmuring. Obey for the love of God, who is represented in your parents. Then will your obedience be pleasing to the heavenly Father, and you will merit the blessings promised to obedient children (Eccl. iii, 6, etc).

The third duty of children towards their parents is support and assistance. Our parents furnished our support and did not stop at

trouble and expense in order to insure our mental and physical welfare. Hence it is proper that we should care for their support if old age, infirmity, or misfortune put them beyond the possibility of caring for themselves. To aid our parents is a duty so sacred and inviolable that it is even placed above many other obligations. So, for instance, a son may feel the call to be a priest; a daughter may have a vocation for the religious life; but if the following of these vocations interferes with the support of needy parents, they are obliged to forego their vocation until the parents no longer need their help. A good and dutiful person, as a matter of fact, knows no sweeter or pleasanter satisfaction than that of caring for his or her parents, and of recompensing them, in part, at least, for the many benefits which the parents have bestowed.

These are the duties incumbent upon children towards their parents, and of which St. Paul says that you must make a return of duty to your parents (I. Tim. v, 4). You owe them love and respect, because to them you owe your life; obedience, because you owe your progress to their wisdom and advice; support, because they looked out for your maintenance. Remember that the fulfilling of the fourth commandment will bring you blessing even upon this earth. The Lord insists so much upon the love of parents that to this commandment alone He has added the promise of earthly reward, of a long life and of wellbeing upon earth. By a long life may, perhaps, be understood a life filled with most important blessings of heaven (Wisd. iv, 8). These blessings, as the Holy Spirit tells us, are that you shall experience in your own children the steadfastness and safety of your household, honor, and esteem before the world, the pardon of your sins, and eternal happiness after death. Amen.

## XXXIX. The Duties of Children Towards Their Parents. II.

The inviolable duties of children towards their parents are, as I have explained to you: respect, obedience, and support. In the fulfilment of these duties consists true filial love. Let me ask now, do all children fulfil these obligations required by natural sentiment as well as by God's law? Alas, many children transgress their duties towards their parents and render themselves deserving of severe punishments.

When children are growing up they endeavor to throw off the yoke, and refuse submission to parental discipline. They wish to do as they please, to associate with whomsoever they will, to go wherever they choose. Hence the untruthful excuses, the stubborn objections, the disrespectful answers, contemptuous silence and demeanor, the show of temper, the defiant mien, which only too often exasperate parents and produce words and deeds of anger.

This behavior is frequently the rule with children who have become self-supporting. Father or mother often have to be careful in addressing them, so as to avoid impertinent answers. "What business is it yours?" "Look after your own affairs!" is often the reply. "We are old enough and strong enough to take care of ourselves!" "I do not need your supervision!" "Keep your advice!" "I know as much about things as you do, and want to live in my own way!" Is this becoming talk for a child towards father or mother? And yet you all know only too well that I am quoting very familiar facts.

The other day I went to see an old friend of my family. His white

hair, his body stooped under the weight of years of hard work, inspired me with respect and reverence. I found him very much depressed and sad, and I asked: "Did some misfortune happen, uncle?" "Alas, father," he made answer, "I have so much trouble that I ask the good Lord every day to take me out of the world where I am of no further use, and where the bread that I eat is begrudged me. I am the father of three children; these trembling hands have labored hard and unceasingly to bring them up. To give them a good education and put them on their own feet I sacrificed the little that I had saved. And now, when I have nothing, and am no longer able to earn my bread, these same children have no further use for me. They quarrel amongst themselves as to who shall keep me. If I speak, I am bidden to be silent; they tell me I am talking nonsense. When I complain of my ailings, I can see that they wish it were the end. My grandchildren, following the example of their parents, ridicule me and make merry at my infirmities. Can you blame me if I wish I were dead?"

"My dear friend," I answered, "I fully understand your position, and I will speak to your children about this thing, and remind them of their duty." "I beg of you," he replied, "do not mention a word of this. For my lot will be all the harder if they learn that I have complained to you about it."

Dear brethren, this is not an extraordinary case. There are many of them, too many. So many, in fact, that we cease to be surprised and shocked in meeting with such cases.

And yet, such treatment of parents is a great crime. Parents are for their children the representatives of God. Many are the anxieties and cares they have borne for you, great the solicitudes they have had in raising you. With affection and tenderness they cared for you in your infancy. Many signs of their love you received from

them. Truly, the son, the daughter who does not love his or her parents is an ingrate, a monster. It was God Himself who spoke to Moses: "If a man have a stubborn and unruly son, who will not hear the commandments of his father or mother, and, being corrected, slighteth obedience, they shall take him and bring him to the ancients of the city, and to the gate of judgment, and shall say to them: "This, our son, is rebellious and stubborn; he slighteth hearing our admonitions; he giveth himself to revelling, and to debauchery and banquetings. The people of the city shall stone him; and he shall die, that you may take away the evil out of the midst of you, and all Israel, hearing it, may be afraid" (Deut. xxi, 18-21).

May these considerations and facts help to impress upon you the great importance of filial love, so that through the love, veneration, and assistance which you render your parents you may receive the fulness of heavenly graces and blessings (Deut. xxviii, 12). Even in heathen and savage races it is considered a sacred duty for children to care for their parents and to support them. Even the pagan Cicero exclaimed: "It is shameful not to support one's parents" (Ep. ad Att., ix, 9); and the Greek philosopher, Plato, taught that one should consider an old father or an old mother a domestic treasure, and should honor them as one would a gift of God. Remember, you can never repay your parents for what they have done and suffered for you. Amen.

## XL. Immodest Talk

It is a deplorable fact that we often hear language used by Catholic Christians which would be shocking even in the mouth of the heathen.

In saloons and other meeting-places of idlers, in workshops, in factories and workrooms, and, sad to relate, even in Christian homes we may often hear improper allusions, and so-called jests about immodest things. Some particularly foul-mouthed persons seem to actually pride themselves on their stock of filthy stories and jests.

What reputation do all those gain who render themselves guilty of such abominable talk? If decent and respectable persons are present to hear their vile remarks, what will they think, what opinion will they form? They will surely get a most unfavorable opinion of such persons, and rightly so. It is natural that we like to converse about that which is uppermost in our minds. Hence, we may presume that those who like to converse about impure and dishonorable things are corrupt, that they are dominated by vice, otherwise they would not use such vicious language.

It is the tongue which makes known what is in the heart, says St. John Chrysostom, and St. Thomas Aquinas openly declares that only those whose hearts are filled with shameful passions and impurity delight in carrying on shameful and impure discourse. This, then, is the fame which these guilty tongues acquire, and also the persons who laugh at such language and applaud, because they are no less corrupt and bad. Decent and respectable persons will only get angry at such discourse and resent its use in their presence.

But not only do such impure tongues lose their honor, they ruin their own souls and the souls of others. Immodest conversations are sinful, even if conducted in jest or joke, in order to amuse the company. God, through the mouth of the apostle, says: "But fornication and all uncleanness . . . let it not so much as be named among you, as it becometh saints. Nor obscenity, nor foolish talking, nor scurrility" (Ephes. v, 3, 4). And He demands: "Put away filthy speech out of your mouth" (Coloss. iii, 8). Hence, St. John Chrysostom observes that those who speak gladly of divine things, converse in the language of God, and those who carry on immodest and improper discourse, talk the language of the devil. The Holy Spirit proclaims: "A slippery mouth worketh ruin" (Prov. xxvi, 28). Ruin for the souls of those who use foul speech, and the souls of those who listen to it.

Alas, many innocent souls have fallen into the mire of vice because they willingly listened to immodest conversation. And wo to those who accomplish their ruin. Bear in mind the warning of Christ, who one day took a child by the hand, and with great severity exclaimed: "But he that shall scandalize one of these little ones that believeth in Me, it were better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Mass. xviii, 6).

There are persons who excuse themselves by saying: When I relate immodest jests I am careful not to do so before children, nor before those who might learn wrong therefrom. I carry on such conversations only with those who are used to such talk. And do you imagine that you are then not sinning? Even if such persons are used to such talk you are giving them occasion to sin, because impure conversations have a great power to incite to sin.

Then again the excuse is made that improper conversations are

carried on for fun, in order to amuse. But how can Christians and disciples of Jesus Christ, who profess a religion so wholly pure, holy and spotless, proffer such an excuse. In order to amuse others is it permissible to offend God, to injure our souls and the souls of others? Is it possible, exclaims Bishop Salvianus in astonishment, that you cannot amuse yourselves without resorting to impurity and sin? Is it possible that one cannot converse without dwelling on impure and improper subjects?

Christians who have the habit of immodest talk burden their souls with countless sins, and are responsible for the souls they lead upon the downward path by their suggestive talk. Wo unto them if they do not take all possible pains to rid themselves of this vile habit. Apart from the disgrace and contempt which they earn in this life, they are hastening to an eternal punishment. Hence, let your chief attention be directed towards avoiding all scandal-giving. As we let the surgeon amputate even hand or foot if necessary to save the life of the body, so we must abandon favorite occasions, and give up even dear acquaintances, that may tempt us to sin.

Let not immoral discourse revile your tongue, use not the language of the devil, that murderer from the beginning (John viii, 44), who sows tares amongst the wheat, and delivers the soul to divine malediction and eternal ruin. May the Lord graciously give you all the grace of purity, purity of the heart, purity of the mind, purity of the tongue. Amen.

## XLI. Envy

A vice of the worst kind, the seed of which is in the heart of every human being, no matter of what age or station, is the vice of envy. In its baseness as well as in its harmfulness, it well ranks with the vice of pride. In fact, the vice of pride is usually accompanied by the vice of envy.

Envy is the unreasonable displeasure, and vexation of spirit, about the possession or the good fortune of our neighbor. Envy is a grievous sin, and so that you may conceive a profound detestation of this vice, and be on your guard against it, I will show you how envy makes men the accomplices of the devil, and makes them experience in this life the chastisement of hell.

The opinions of the theologians differ in regard to Lucifer's sin. Some think that it was pride, his desire to be like unto God. St. Augustine, however, teaches that his sin was envy. When Lucifer saw that the Almighty subjected all creatures to the dominion of the first man, he was consumed by envy, and considered that the preference of Adam meant his own abasement. Therefore, he rebelled against God, and, having realized his impotence against God, he turned his entire rage against mankind. He set about to injure the creature when he could not injure the Creator.

In Satan, therefore, envy has its source. The envious are his disciples, and, by imitating so wicked a master, they participate also in his chastisements. The envious are made so wretched by this vice that nothing can satisfy them. Nothing they acquire appears to them of real value, nothing pleases them, because they have their

mind upon the possessions of their neighbor and consider them superior to what they have, and being wretched himself the envious wants to see everybody else wretched.

This is the devil's character. Rather than allow them to participate in the celestial glory he would like to see the angels and saints as unhappy as himself, and his malice is, as the Holy Spirit declares in the Book of Wisdom (Serm. 122), imitated by those who are his partisans. The envious cannot endure to see anyone happy. Hence, they tarnish the good name of their neighbors by defamation, by calumnies, they promote quarrels and dissensions, they seek to cause harm and confusion, and thus endeavor to make the neighbor participators in their misfortune because they are unable to share in their neighbor's happiness. If heaven blesses the toil of the farmer, if good fortune favors the endeavors of a merchant, if a young woman makes a good marriage, how many there are whose malicious envy begrudges the good fortune of these people!

And what advantage do the envious derive from the greedy looks they cast longingly at the good fortune of their neighbors? Absolutely none. They sin against Divine Providence, who dispenses His gifts with wisdom and clemency (Wis. viii, 1), and since they render themselves guilty of the devil's sin, they suffer by their envy in advance the torments of hell. There are three conditions which make the torments of the damned so terrible: the torments are unceasing, they are without possibility of alleviation, and they are suffered without any advantage; these same conditions combine to make the envious unhappy.

The good fortune of others being always in evidence, the ill-will grants the envious no rest nor peace. Thus are verified the words of the Holy Spirit, that envy is inexorable and cruel as hell (Cant. viii, 6).

And as the heart pangs of the envious are unremitting, they are also without remedy. As envy takes part in the sin of Satan, it must share Satan's unchangeable punishment.

And, finally, all the worries and vexations are wholly without advantage to the envious. However much their neighbor's good fortune may disturb them, they cannot take away his merits, still less stop the abundant blessings that heaven lavishes upon him. All that they see and hear is a torment and an anguish for them like unto the damned in hell, who suffer unceasingly without drawing any advantage from their torments. Because envy is the direct opposite of brotherly love, the neighbor's happiness which in a reasonable way should make us glad by reason of Christian charity, causes to the envious only anguish of heart.

My dear brethren, if you would have a share in the kingdom of God, you must ever bear in mind that in all things His most holy will, and not yours, must be done (Matt. vi, 10). We all are members of the spiritual Body of Jesus Christ. The gifts and blessings which Divine Providence distributes unequally, but ever from the most just and most wise intentions, to every individual member, contribute to the perfection of mankind and to the greater glory of God. As in heaven all the blessed are satisfied with their own bliss, and rejoice in one another's happiness, so, too, must we rejoice at the gifts and the good fortune of our neighbor, even if they surpass ours. Let us exercise that holy zeal which the apostle recommended to the Galatians (Gal. iv, 18), let us strive to imitate the virtues of our own favored neighbors and, if possible, surpass them in merit; not, however, to be praised of men, but for the recompense in heaven, and especially that God may thereby be more glorified throughout eternity. Amen.

## XLII. Calumny

One of the most widely spread vices is the vice of calumny. It is prevalent amongst persons of all conditions, even persons otherwise righteous betray frequently by the license of their tongue their frailty and imperfection. Hence St. James could say with truth "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man" (James iii, 2).

Wherever people engage in conversation, gossip about the neighbor is usually retailed and listened to with pleasure. If sins against the neighbor are more grievous in proportion to the harm done him, we must say that calumny is indeed a great evil, because it deprives man of one of his most precious possessions, his good name and his honor. And this is accomplished without effort and without trouble, for it is a strange fact that whereas unimpeachable proof and argument are required to establish a person's good character, a single word, or even only a gesture or ominous silence, are quite sufficient to establish his shortcomings.

Our honor, my dear brethren, must, as the Holy Spirit says in Holy Scripture, be preferred to all the riches of the world, and, with Judas Maccabees, you will agree that at times it would be a lesser harm to lose your life than to tarnish your name with disgrace (I. Macc. ix, 10). It is this honor, this reputation and good name, that one is deprived of by calumniators and slanderers, and they are, therefore, more reprehensible than even the thief who lays hands on his neighbor's property, more iniquitous than the highway robber who attacks the life and property of man.

But not only is actual calumny sin, speaking about the neighbor

that what is not true, but also the defaming or tale-bearing, the unnecessary spreading of disparaging things that are true of our neighbor. Such truths are generally delighted in by the lovers of gossip who, indeed, had better look to their own faults. It is a sin against charity to spread knowledge of a person's faults without good reason. It is also a sin against justice, because those who committed the faults may have made amends and may have been forgiven by God.

It is really surprising how readily persons will reveal the faults and frailties of others to those who have no business to know them, and how silent they are when it is a matter of bringing such faults to the knowledge of those who *should* be informed. When it is their bounden duty to speak, all are silent. This, of course, proves the evil intent of such people.

And think of the disastrous consequence of such slanderous gossip. How many heartaches it causes, how many lives it ruins, how many friends it separates, how many homes it poisons.

The injury occasioned to the neighbor by slanderous tongues, is so much more harmful because it is so difficult to repair. How will the calumniator, or slanderer, repair the injured reputation of his neighbor? Even if the slanderer takes back what he has said, and uses every effort to restore his neighbor's reputation, of which he has deprived him by his wicked tongue, his calumnies have spread from tongue to tongue, they may be likened to a river which in its course digs its bed deeper and deeper, and becomes ever larger. How it is possible to trace the road a calumny takes? The world rather believes the bad than the good, it will more readily remember the evil news that you spread, even if it knows of your retraction, and thus the injury inflicted upon your neighbor is often irreparable.

It seems to me that he who willingly listens to a calumniator is,

in a certain sense, more guilty than the calumniator himself, because the calumniator is often encouraged by the approval of those who listen to him. If the hearer signified his displeasure the calumniator would desist from his slander.

What about you, dear brethren, do you, like King David, abhor the calumniator (Ps. c, 5), or do you become an accessory in his guilt by receiving him with kindly attention? Do you not incite him in his defamatory conversations by silent or open approval?

I implore you to heed the admonition of the Holy Spirit and lend no ear to the despoilers of your neighbor's honor; abhor the slanderers, repel them in every instance. If, perhaps, your subordinate position will not permit of this, then show at least by your behavior that you give little heed to their words, that you place no credence in them. The Holy Spirit warns us, "Have nothing to do with detractors, for their destruction shall rise suddenly" (Prov. xxiv, 21, 22).

Detraction and tale bearing is a monstrous crime for those who utter the same as well as for those who willingly listen to it, because it is so very difficult to retract slander and repair an injured name. May your tongue only set itself in motion, and your ears only be opened, to speak and receive language that behoves the Christian, language that is in accord with the two great commands: the love of God and the love of the neighbor. Amen.

## XLIII. Lying

Rare, indeed, are in this world sincerity and truth. On all sides we meet with deceit, falsehood and lies. One might almost suppose that the chief aim of the human race was to deceive and cheat. In spite of this, the name of cheat and liar is considered so disgraceful that even the person who deserves the name hates to be called so. And yet, though so greatly detested, this vice of deception and mendacity is very prevalent among men. Jesus Christ desires that we should be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect (Matt. v, 46). This we cannot hope to be, however, if we do not profess the truth, because God is truth. Through the falsehood of our tongues we deserve the name of children of Satan, because he is the father of lies" (John viii, 44).

To lie means to say what is not true with the intention of deceiving our neighbor. God has given us speech, that we may communicate one to another our thoughts and sentiments. Speech is the bond which joins mankind into a mutual benefit society. The liar, however, makes use of speech to cheat his brethren. Hence, he sins against the proper aim and purpose of speech, he leads others into error, and attempts to destroy that charitable communion which should prevail amongst men, and which is chiefly fostered through the instrument of speech. For this reason the Holy Spirit says, in Holy Scripture, that the lie is a foul blot in man, that the liar's life will be without honor and full of confusion (Ecclus. xx, 26, 28), and in the Book of Proverbs we read, "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord" (Prov. xii, 22).

Abhorrence of mendacity is inborn in human nature. See the blush of shame on the face of persons caught in a lie; their mortification if they find themselves treated as liars and cheats. This proves that lies are repugnant to natural feeling as something shameful and detestable. How is it possible, then, that man, who finds it so disagreeable to be found out in a lie, or to be accused of such, still does not hesitate about telling a lie? You cannot excuse yourself by saying that your lies do harm to no one. It is never lawful to lie. "Be not willing to make any manner of lie, for the custom thereof is not good," the Holy Spirit admonishes us through the wise Sirach (Ecclus. vii, 14), and therewith condemns all lies without exception.

Worse are, of course, lies intended to inflict injury upon our neighbor, and their guilt is measured by the harm which they cause, or may cause. Unfortunately, this kind of lie is most prevalent. Among all lies the most serious is that of giving false testimony in court. This crime is not only committed by those who swear falsely in the court of law, but also by those who induce others to perjure themselves by any means whatsoever. Of this sort of lie, St. John says: "Such sin is of special gravity; first of all, because it does not lead into error merely a private person, but the public authority, which, in the interest of the public welfare, has all the more right to learn the truth; and also because perjury is a sacrilegious abuse of the most sacred name of God, thus invoked as witness to an untruth." Perjury to the detriment of a neighbor is the most malicious of all calumny, the most serious injury to his property. For, according to the deposition of witnesses, judge and jury decide the case, and if there is false testimony to the detriment of the neighbor, the gravest consequences may result for him against all right and justice.

It is also, of course, wrong to commit perjury in favor of an accused person. It remains perjury, and it violates justice and the

public welfare, by bringing about the release of a guilty person in contravention of the law. It is, and remains, a lie and an untruth, which by no possible advantage can be justified.

Now, although every one easily perceives that lies are unlawful when they may bring harm to our neighbor, there are people who cannot understand that it is unlawful to lie in order to prevent a wrong, or in order to accomplish some good. Of these lies, even persons of sensitive consciences have frequently no horror, because they think that they are justified by acting from good motives. But St. Paul plainly tells us that it is always foolish to do evil that good may come (Rom. ii, 8). Your motive may be good, your intention likewise, but if the means you make use of are bad, that suffices to make the act unlawful. It is not lawful to steal money in order to give it as alms, nor is it lawful to lie to accomplish good or to pre vent evil.

However, while it is never lawful to lie, neither is one always obliged to reveal the truth. There is a great difference between telling an untruth and withholding the truth. The former is unlawful, the latter is often perfectly proper, at times even required. The use of speech must be circumspect and prudent, and truthfulness ceases to be a virtue, and may become sinful, when we reveal something that for good reason should be kept secret. Hence, there is a time to talk and a time to keep silence (Rom. iii, 8). We must speak the truth unconditionally when duty requires it, when the welfare of the neighbor demands it, or the one asking us has a right to know the truth. On the other hand, we must withhold the truth when it concerns the failings of others, when it is merely a matter of gossip and when the revealing would do injury to the neighbor; also when important secrets that have been confided to us are concerned. In such cases our revelation of the facts to persons

not entitled to this knowledge would be a breach of faith and against Christian charity. "He that walketh deceitfully, says the Holy Spirit, revealeth secrets, but he that is faithful, concealeth the thing committed to him by his friend" (Prov. xi, 13). Such misuse of confidence may cause injury to others, and will reap for ourselves the aversion and displeasure of our fellow men, often even their wrath and hatred. Servants and subordinates are obliged to observe silence regarding the domestic happenings and the business of their employers. It is, in fact, considered very dishonorable for an employee to reveal the business affairs of his employer.

Nevertheless, the privilege of withholding the truth when conditions demand this, does not excuse us from being truthful in what we do say. Nothing inspires greater confidence than the quality of truth-telling in a man, and nothing is more repulsive than double-dealing. But, apart from these worldly reasons, we ought always to bear in mind the words of the Holy Spirit, "that the tongue that beareth witness bringeth death" (Ecclus xxviii, 13), and "that God has pledged His word to destroy all habitual liars" (Ps. v, 7; Prov. xix, 9-21, 28, etc.). Amen.

## XLIV. Sins of Thought

There is, dear brethren, a vast difference between divine and human justice. As mankind can take notice only of exterior, visible things, human justice punishes merely the bad action that is known and proved, the bad thought goes unpunished, no matter how culpable and criminal it may be. The Lord, however, sees the thought. No thought, be it buried ever so deep in the heart, escapes His notice, and He punishes not only the sinful actions, but also the wicked desires and thoughts of men.

Some Christians give little heed to bad thoughts and consider them harmless, and thus they burden their souls with a multitude of sins. The fathers of the Council of Trent, however, teach that sins of thought are at times more dangerous, in that they injure souls often more fatally, than sins of deed.

It is an article of faith that, despite Adam's sin, we still have free will. It depends upon our own wills then to choose the good or the bad (Wis. i, 3; I. Kings xvi, 17). Since, therefore, man possesses unrestricted freedom of will, his ultimate fate, eternal salvation or everlasting damnation, depends upon himself. We cannot grievously offend God by a sinful act to which our will does not give full consent. Satan, the world, and the flesh, are the three enemies that unceasingly incite us to transgress God's commandments. But their deceptions and seductive representations do not suffice to lead men to sin. The will alone is responsible. Concupiscence, the rebellion of sensuality against reason, may present impure images, the

world may charm with its unholy treasures, the devil may suggest evil things, but all impulses, all thoughts, awakened in us by these attacks are not sin unless we actually will to defile ourselves. Temptation does not harm where the consent of the will is lacking.

To voluntarily entertain a thought contrary to the law of God is sinful. When the reason recognizes that the subject is unlawful and the will voluntarily dwells upon it, even if only for a moment, we are guilty of sin. A bad thought is sinful, again, when we agree to think of sinful things with the intention of transgressing the divine law by action, even if subsequently we do not really commit the action because of lack of opportunity or for other reasons. This wicked intent is the unlawful desire. Jesus Christ warns us that "whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. v, 28). The wickedness of those who have evil intent and those who actually do wrong is hardly different in degree.

It should not be thought now that the sin accomplished by an exterior act is not greater than the sinful desire. By proceeding to the exterior deed one lets the sinful will continue to act so much longer and more violently; furthermore, the exterior act is followed, as a rule, by some scandal or injury to our neighbor. Thus the actual murderer sins more grievously than he who has only the desire to slay. Theft is more culpable than the desire to steal. Immodest actions are greater sins than the consent to impure thoughts, and so on.

That bad thoughts are sins and will be severely punished is the teaching of Holy Writ. Lucifer, and many other angels, were expelled from heaven on account of their impious thoughts. And thus shall we be lost eternally if in our hearts we harbor thoughts offensive to God.

How, then, may we protect and defend ourselves against bad thoughts? If a spark of fire should fall upon your clothes you would at once shake it off or smother it, thus preventing it from doing harm. You must do exactly the same with bad thoughts. If you steadfastly refuse to admit them into your mind and deny them consent to stay, be assured that you will succeed in escaping injury.

The devil can excite the passions and incite us to sin by evil suggestions, but he is absolutely unable to make unlawful thoughts dwell in our hearts unless our perverse inclinations attract them and our will tolerate them. Therefore, we cannot bridle our thoughts if we do not carefully watch over our senses. Sinful associations, frivolous conversations, unchaste looks, idleness, intemperance, improper amusements, are the pernicious sources of sinful thoughts. If even the saints, separated from the world and emaciated by rigorous penance, complained of their temptations, it must be plain that those who even seek the occasion cannot remain undefiled. We all feel, in consequence of the sin of our first parents, the inward struggle of inclination against reason about which the apostle complains so much (Rom. vii, 23). We can triumph over bad thoughts by living remote from dangerous occasions, and by remembering that death may come at any moment to lead us before the judgment seat of God, to receive eternal reward or eternal punishment as our portion.

Victory is assured us by the unremitting resistance to improper thoughts. But, if we once let them get a firm foothold, they will take root, and then it will be very difficult, almost impossible, to expel them. Young shoots are easily pulled out of the ground, but when they have grown older and their roots have spread upon every side, much effort is required to remove them. "The first sinful suggestion," says St. Bernard, "is the head of the infernal serpent who

would enter into your heart, and if we do not resist it, we shall be conquered before we know it."

Let us flee, therefore, the incentives to bad thoughts, let us beware of taking any pleasure in such thoughts, of being led to consent to them. If we open our hearts to impure images, to sinful representations and unlawful thoughts, it will be a miracle of divine mercy, if, at the moment of our death, we can contemplate the fundamental truths with profit, for it is but natural that the objects wherein we took pleasure in life will dominate our thoughts also in death. In moments of temptation let us follow the good advise of the Holy Spirit to divert our minds to our last end and meditate upon the eternal truths (Ecclus. vii, 40). Then we shall be careful not to offend God, who sees all things, and who neither leaves the wicked without punishment nor the good without reward. Amen.

## XLV. Dangerous Occasions

It is strange how different and contradictory are the views taken by people according to particular circumstances. This is very much the case in regard to resistance to temptation. A warning to avoid the near occasion of sin is ridiculed by the person so warned, because he claims that no temptation is strong enough to vanquish his or her virtue. And, immediately after, when the occasion has brought about this very person's downfall, he or she pleads just the opposite, namely, that virtue could not vanquish the temptation.

We must once for all realize the truth that we cannot remain in God's friendship unless we flee occasions that put us in danger of offending Him. "He that loveth danger," says the Holy Spirit," shall perish in it" (Ecclus. iii, 27). "It would be a greater miracle," says St. Cyprian, "to live in dangerous occasions without falling into sin than to see lambs remain unharmed in the company of wolves."

In order to accomplish a certain purpose it is necessary to employ the suitable means. The farmer who desires a harvest plows the soil, sows the grain and gives his fields continued attention. So, too, is this true with regard to evil undertakings. He with murder in his mind, will carefully lay out his plans so as to make sure of his victim. And Satan, in order to lead souls into perdition, does not content himself with suggesting wickedness. We are sufficiently tempted by our own concupiscence, says the apostle (James i, 14). The devil employs additional means, and one of his most powerful and pernicious is the occasion of sin. With the aid of his

votaries such as ribald and licentious persons, slanderers, thieves, drunkards, infidels, and so on, he prepares the occasion of sin and traps the unwary. His partisans are well skilled in the art of seduction, and, inspired by their master, the devil, they know how to batter down the ramparts of virtue and of good resolutions. And where the attractiveness of vice is not sufficient, ridicule very often is.

Would to God it were not so, dear brethren, but in the presence of danger courage seems to fail and no virtue seems to avail. "I have beheld with my own eyes," says St. Cyprian, "how men distinguished by apparently inviolable probity were crushed by the occasion of sin." The occasion may begin with a jest, a pleasant association, but in the end what a defeat, what an abyss of vice. Age and experience are not safeguards, occasion overpowers everything. He who ventures into the occasion of sin falls inevitably, and those only may hope to triumph who take to flight. St. Jerome assures us that he who thinks he can remain in the occasion of sin without being defiled is sadly in error.

Dear brethren, if you really have at heart the saving of your soul, beware of the dangers, avoid the pitfalls, keep far from the snares of sin. This is the weapon which the Holy Spirit advises (Prov. xi, 15). He declares that He is doubtful of the salvation of those who would, as it were, play with danger (Ecclus. iii, 27).

But, you may reply, if it is as bad as all this, we shall have to renounce all friendships, leave our homes, flee the world, and hide ourselves in the desert, for thus only may we live remote from all occasions for sin. In our own family they are vexations which incite to sin; every place we go to we may be more or less tempted to sin. Therefore, if it is our duty to flee all occasions for sin, we are in a frightful predicament. Now, this is an unreasonable objection as you will presently see. Divine Providence has placed you in your

position in the world and you have to work out your salvation in this position. The large number of saints who now dwell victoriously in heaven were not by any means all hermits or cloistered. In fact, the greater part of them lived in the world, as you do, surrounded by occasions for sin, like you, and exposed to all the dangers that you are. And yet they preserved their innocence and became saints. Why? Because they were in accord with the teaching of the great apostle, and used this world as if they used it not (I. Cor. vii, 31). They understood how to see and not to see, to speak and to be silent, to flee and to stand still, according as the conditions of place, time and association required. It is our duty to do the same. It is our duty to shun to our best ability the occasion of sin. You will meet with difficulties, and you will have to do violence to your inclination to remain away from certain places and from certain persons, to flee certain association which appeal to your tastes. "We cannot merit heaven without effort. The kingdom of heaven suffers violence and only the violent bear it away" (Matt. xi, 12; Luke xvi, 16).

If, in spite of our carefulness, we are placed in danger, without having sought it, then, be convinced, we have nothing to fear. The Lord who ransomed us with His precious Blood will hasten to our assistance with His divine grace and not permit us to succumb. Harm will come only if we cherish dangerous occasions, if we seek out the snares set for us. St. Augustine says that no one sins on account of things from which he cannot guard himself.

You see, then, how important it is that we promptly flee dangerous occasions if we would keep free from sin. Do not plead your own interests, or fear of worldly disadvantage, as an excuse to seek such occasions. Let us rather be reminded of the strict precept of the Lord, who wills that we shun, at all costs, the dangers to sin, and

who says: "And if thy hand or thy foot scandalize thee, cut it off and cast it from thee" (Matt. xviii, 8, 9). This means that even if a person or object is very dear to us, and as useful even as eye, hand and foot, yet we must relinquish them if they are an occasion of sin to us. It is a question of eternal happiness or eternal unhappiness; it is a question of losing or gaining God for all eternity. It is a question of being eternally blessed or eternally wretched. What could be more important? Take counsel with yourselves, dear brethren, and be in earnest about your good resolutions. The path to hell, is the saying, is paved with good intentions. Let us be vigilant, let us pray, and avail ourselves diligently of the means of grace, and God will help us to victory. Amen.

## XLVI. Sins of Habit

A voluntary action frequently repeated establishes an inclination for this action and forms a habit. Blessed are they who through continued exercise of virtuous actions have acquired an aptitude and a habit for good deeds. They will be easy victors in the combat in which we are engaged in this life, against the enemies of our salvation.

But unhappy are they who have contracted the habit of sin, and who are in peril of being irrevocably lost. If eternal salvation is not completely impossible it is at least exceedingly difficult for an habitual sinner, because he will either voluntarily persevere in sin, or his bad habits have him so overpowered that the strength for conversion is lacking.

The sinner who commits a grievous sin for the first time usually realizes the gravity of his offense, he feels the weight of his guilt and fears the deserved punishment. But if he does not immediately turn to penance, and prefers to commit the sin again and again, he will soon cease to regard it as so grievous a thing and, as the commissions of this sin increase in number and gravity, they appear to him ever more trifling and indifferent. He finally arrives at the state in which he commits the sin without ever giving a thought to the fact that he does wrong. He has acquired the habit, and this sinful act is now a seeming necessity for him. He is then counted among those of whom the Holy Spirit says that they glory in their iniquity and rejoice at having sinned (Prov. x, 23; Ps. xciii, 3). There can be no greater misfortune than this apparent serenity, this

apparent contentment of the sinner, encouraged by the temporary exemption from punishment for his sins. Living a life of sin without an uneasy conscience, without all apprehension, is a most dangerous condition.

"He who sins," says St. Augustine, "has the desire to sin again, and if he cherishes this sinful desire, he acquires the habit of sinning, and the sin becomes a necessity for him."

Hence it is that the habitual sinner, even if he has the desire to abandon sin, finds it often impossible to repent of the same and to desist from it. The Holy Spirit warns us that the habitual sinner has his bones filled with the vices of his youth, that he shall not set them aside, but sleep with them in the grave (Job xx, 11). He who sins grievously from ignorance or frailty will not find it difficult to return to the Lord, but he who sins from habit, will often find that the habit blocks his return to God as with an insurmountable rock.

It is a doctrine of our faith that we must, on our part, render ourselves receptive for the sanctifying grace which the Lord offers us, that we must seek and receive it of our own accord. If we have sinned, we must detest our sins, and turn our will towards God, the source of all good. God, who has given us existence without our consent, will not save us without our consent.

Obviously it is not easy for an habitual sinner to make the effort required to break the fetters with which he is so tightly bound. In fact, he will usually not even think of his conversion. But if he has the thought of conversion, how is faith to be revived in him again, hope cannot be reanimated, how can his long-fostered affection for a particular sin be changed into abhorrence for it. In consequence of his perversion, brought about by his habitual sinning, his reason is obscured and his judgment misled.

Now, I do not say, and cannot say, that all habitual sinners are

hopelessly lost. True, it is extremely difficult to overcome a bad habit, but it would also be a grievous sin to despair in the mercy of God as long as one has not departed from this life.

The first and chief means; absolutely indispensable for the conversion of an habitual sinner, consists in fleeing the places, the persons and the occasions that have been the cause of his relapses into sin. Furthermore, the sinner must exert all his energy in opposing the bad habit. St. Bernard once converted an habitual sinner by inducing him to abstain for three days from his sin in honor of the blessed Trinity. When the man had done this, the saint begged for three more days of abstinence from sin as a mark of gratitude to the precious Blood of Christ. After that, three more days in honor of the Mother of God, and so forth. By this simple procedure this poor sinner was helped to vanquish completely his bad habit.

It is necessary, also, to go often to confession, if possible to the same confessor, and to obey faithfully his directions. Prayer and contemplation of the divine truths, especially of death and eternity, are indispensable. Finally, the habitual sinner should arouse in himself a great confidence in the infinite mercy of God, and invoke the aid of the saints and especially of the blessed Virgin.

And you, my brethren, who have been so fortunate as not to have acquired any bad habits, beware of the first steps upon the path of sin. If you should ever have the misfortune of falling into grievous sin, be sure to rise again quickly and hasten to efface the same. Permit it not to strike root in your heart. Hasten with all speed to the holy Sacrament of Penance. Confession prevents sin from taking root by effacing its pernicious consequences, and by granting a special power against relapse. If you hesitate you will be in danger of delaying your conversion until it is too late. Death will claim all of us, and wo to those who are found unprepared. Amen.

## XLVII. Forgiving Our Enemies

It is an article of faith that we must love God with our whole hearts, and that we must also love our neighbor as ourselves (Mark xii, 30, 31).

Among the number of our neighbors are counted also our enemies, no matter what wrong they may have inflicted upon us, and it follows that we, in order to enter into heaven, must love even our enemies and forgive them the injury they have done us. He who does not so forgive, cannot hope for forgiveness by God. For those who do not practise mercy in this life there will be no divine mercy in the other.

Now if you, dear brethren, are asked what sentiments you cherish towards your enemies, you will probably answer that you forgive them. And in the prayer which you address to God so often you say: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" (Matt. vi, 12). But while you so readily acknowledge your obligation of forgiving and loving your enemies, let us see whether you actually practise in deed that which you profess by word. How do you really in your daily life meet those, for instance, who have uttered slanders about you, blackened your good name, brought your family into ill-repute, or abused your children; or those who wrongfully injured you in business affairs, who have made use of their opportunity to harm you in your possessions.

Do you harbor sentiments that would make you pray in your heart: Remove from my heart, O God, the feeling of bitterness and take away the remembrance of the injuries endured from my enemy. Enlighten him and inspire him with better intentions, make him

perceive the wrong he is doing, that he may return the kindly feeling which I have for him.

These, dear brethren, will be your sentiments, if you truly forgive your enemies. Enter into your heart, therefore, and examine what your feelings and inclinations are. And when you assert that you forgive your enemies, ascertain whether your heart is in accord with your word, or whether your conscience does not rather accuse you of falsehood. Do you speak with sincerity of heart when you say: Lord, forgive me, as I forgive my enemies, treat me in the same way as I treat those who hate and persecute me? Reflect well on this very important matter.

For instance, if it be true that you forgive your enemies, how do you explain the fact that it costs you so great an effort to take a step towards reconciliation with them? You say you will not take the first step. If he greets you, you will greet him; if he speaks, you will answer. But will a person speak thus who no longer has aversion in his heart? And in the same breath you calmly assert that you forgive your offenders, that you love your enemies. Again, if you have sincerely forgiven them, whence that coldness and the contemptuous and bitter tone in your speech when speaking of your antagonists. Whence the ill-disguised joy when his good name is hurt, or when he meets with misfortune? Why does it annoy you if one speak well of him, or if fortune is favorable to him? Why do you avoid opportunities of meeting him? Why do you avoid speaking to him? If you make plain to every one your aversion for him your forgiveness is very dubious; in fact, no one will believe you if you speak of your forgiveness.

Dear brethren, you must see, then, this is not the right way of forgiving your enemies and to love them as God commands you. It rather means the adherence of your hearts to the remembrance of

offenses suffered, of wrongs endured; it means bitterness, ill-will and rancor. All your declarations of forgiveness are, if you act in this manner, a sham and only intended to conceal the hatred which you really nourish in your heart. You profess forgiveness to lull your conscience while your actions belie your words and prove that you are not observing the divine Commandment, which bids you to love your enemies. It is not enough, bear this in mind, to abstain from revenge for wrong suffered. In order to enter into the kingdom of heaven we must obey Jesus Christ, who enjoins upon us an unalterable rule of conduct towards offenders in these words: "But I say to you: Love your enemies; do good to them that hate you; and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you (Matt. v, 44). Amen.

## XLVIII. Meekness

The ancient philosophers praised for their meekness those who resented offenses with moderation, and resented them not from motives of anger but because the offender deserved reproof. Christianity knows a much nobler and more exalted meekness. The law of Christ not only forbids us to be angry at the offender, but enjoins us to repay injury with charity, and offense with kindness. And our divine Lord himself has been the living example of this rare virtue and has invited us all to learn of Him gentleness and meekness (Matt. xi, 5, 21, 29).

Of course the spirit of this world will have none of this virtue. But Jesus Christ teaches us that even under the most trying conditions, we must show ourselves kind and meek. Meekness is, indeed, the true mark of a Christian, without it we cannot possess the kingdom of heaven.

He who is not meek cannot claim to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ, who without complaint let Himself be led to death, and who, dying upon the Cross, implored God's mercy for His executioners, nor will he be recognized as a true child of the heavenly Father, who loves both just and unjust and who imparts His graces to the virtuous and the wicked.

There are three instances in particular in which men are much inclined to harshness; namely, when they are offended, when they reprove those at fault, and when giving orders to inferiors. And just upon these occasions they should use their utmost endeavor to be kind and charitable. It is not difficult for Christians to remain

calm when suffering an offense if they reflect that there is no vexation or contradiction not ordained or at least permitted by God. It appears at first sight that the world might be far happier were it rid of all criminals and wicked persons. But St. Augustine teaches us that it corresponds better to divine wisdom to draw good from the wicked than to destroy everything that is not good. God endures the wicked in the world, so that they either may become converted; or, if they persevere in evil, that they may offer opportunities to the just to practise virtue.

God requires us to be solicitous for our neighbor's spiritual welfare. It is our duty sometimes to reprove the erring, and, if possible, to bring about their conversion. Our divine Saviour enjoins this upon us in the Gospel (Matt. xviii, 15). Our aim must be, however, the conversion and not the confusion of the sinner, and for this reason Jesus Christ tells us it should be carried out in secret (Matt. xviii, 15). And the apostle exhorts us to use all care that our reproofs be gentle and meek (Gal. vi, 1). Harsh and cutting words are calculated to excite resentment, while kindly words appease even the most refractory and excited hearts, as holy Scripture says (Prov. xvi, 1).

Placidity and consideration are especially necessary for those who have to rule and direct inferiors. It is quite certain, says Lactantius, that superiors and heads of families who employ meekness and calmness in their commands, gain the hearts and the good will of their subjects and of their children, whilst those who issue their orders in a dictatorial tone, with severe aspect, dark looks, scolding and censuring, not only incite rebellion, but induce sin. No doubt there are occasions when severity in speech and action are in order; when, for instance, it is a question of things incompatible with the law of God, and opposed to eternal salvation. Be

severe toward the slanderer, show a serious countenance toward those who carry on unchaste conversations, show yourselves unyielding toward those who would lead astray the virtuous, but let your words and your action be seasoned with dignity and charity.

The Son of God declares in the Gospel that the meek are blessed and that they shall possess the land (Matt. v, 4). As a matter of fact, they possess the spiritual land of their hearts and passions, they possess their souls with perseverance and calmness, they possess their God who so tenderly loves the meek of heart. They possess, furthermore, the land of the hearts of others, because they win the good will of all. And because all their works bear the impress of gracious meekness, they are more beloved even than glory and honor (Eccles. iii, 19).

Yet this is only their temporal and transitory reward, only the prelude to the magnificent eternal recompense which finally awaits the meek. The Redeemer calls them blessed, and the Psalmist declares that not only will they possess the land as an inheritance, but, too, they shall taste the delights of a perfect peace (Ps. xxxvi, 11). In this earthly exile of tribulation and unhappiness, there can be no perfect bliss, and we cannot enjoy perfect happiness and true peace where the struggle is constant and the tears abundant. Hence, the happy land promised to the meek is the land of celestial bliss, the heavenly Paradise.

And in truth what more appropriate place could there be for the meek than this Paradise, where all is overflowing with delight, where the blessed dwell in perfect unity as with one heart and one soul? We cannot deny, says the apostle (Rom. viii, 20) that the true mark of our belonging to the elect consists in our transformation into true images of Jesus Christ through the practice of virtue. We can never become like Him unless we are peaceful and meek of

heart. For He practised these virtues to such an extent that He answered not to the insults of his enemies, He resented not indignities and tortures, and He voluntarily delivered Himself up at the tribunal of injustice, to meekly undergo the most agonizing of deaths.

Happy and blessed are we, if in the moment of our death our conscience shall bear witness that we have walked before God in humility, and that we have been peaceful and meek toward our neighbor. Filled with holy confidence, we shall be able, with David, to ask the Lord to graciously remember our meekness, and we shall then partake of the happiness of entering into the land of the elect, there to take possession of the heritage of most perfect peace which the Almighty has promised to the meek of heart.. For the kingdom of God, says the apostle, is not meat and drink, but justice, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost (Rom. xiv, 17). The quarrelsome and the wrathful, however, shall be excluded from the kingdom of peace, because, as the apostle says (James i, 20), it is not possible that anger can have a place in our hearts at the same time with justice. Amen.

## XLIX. Almsgiving

When God created our first parents, He ordained that all creatures of the earth should serve for their maintenance. Since we all are children of Adam, and his heirs, it follows that we all should have some share in what the earth produces.

God loves us all and is solicitous for the welfare of every one of us. Why then has He so disposed it in His Providence that one man has an abundance of earthly goods, whilst another lacks even the things most needed? St. Basil tells us that God wishes to distribute amongst men the various duties through the fulfilment of which they can attain their end, so that the proper employment of earthly wealth may be the path to eternal happiness for the one, and privation endured for the love of God the path for the other.

The giving of alms is, therefore, not an indifferent act which depends upon our own discretion. It is a commandment and an obligation. I will show you, first of all, the great advantage of almsgiving, and the way in which we should give alms in order to draw abundant fruits from our action.

The wealthy have not the right to dispose of their abundance solely to suit themselves, says St. Thomas. The right of ownership is theirs, but as regards the use of it they must give the poor a share of it, and St. Augustine holds that they would render themselves guilty of robbery did they not let those in want partake of their surplus.

The apostles declares that we cannot fulfil the law of Christ unless we bear one another's burdens (Gal. vi, 2). The burden of the poor is their want, the burden of the rich is their overabundance. And

the rich must share his burden with the poor, and the burden of the poor must be assumed by the rich, so that thereby the burdens of both may be eased, that all may follow the path of righteousness.

"Therefore, I command thee," God says to those who are possessed of the goods of this life, "to open thy hand to thy needy and poor brother" (Deut. xv, 11). This proves the positive obligation of almsgiving. Furthermore, Jesus Christ declares that He will condemn to everlasting fire those who refuse to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, and give the support necessary to the poor and needy (Matt. xxv, 41, etc.).

This commandment obliges us to give of our superfluity, but except in extreme cases of need, we are not obliged to deprive ourselves of that which is necessary to maintain our own position. To strip ourselves of everything we have in order to give to the poor, is not a commandment, but only a counsel of Christian perfection (Matt. xix, 21). But it is to be feared that many deceive themselves in determining that which is superfluous and that which is necessary, that they only too readily consider as indispensable things which they might easily spare and distribute amongst the poor. Those, for instance, who spend a great deal of money for luxurious food, or for fine clothes, and claim they cannot afford to give alms, cannot be said to obey the commandment. You have always the means, says St. Leo, to give alms, unless you lack the good will. The requirements of our position should be measured according to the laws of Christian charity and to the rules of prudence, and not merely according to the standards of the world.

Nor did the Lord ordain almsgiving only for the purpose of supporting the poor. He wishes the benefactor to enjoy rich blessings from his generosity. He will gain even more profit from his almsgiving than do the recipients of the alms. Alms efface our sins and

obtain for us God's mercy and the joys of heaven, so we are assured by the Holy Spirit (Tob. xii, 9). Jesus Christ promises to repay the almsgiver a hundredfold and to give him eternal life (Matt. xix, 29).

We often hear the complaint that business is bad, that fields are unfruitful, that incomes are small, and that it is difficult to make ends meet. St. Basil tells us that such conditions are due to our own fault. The Lord shuts His hand because we are not charitable toward our neighbor. If we were ever mindful of the duty of hastening to the assistance of others, then all would be well with us, because the Holy Spirit assures us that he that giveth to the poor shall not want, that those who show mercy and distribute alms will live in peace and quietude (Ps. cxi, 5, 6).

Almsgiving is so meritorious that St. Ambrose compares it to a second baptism, with the difference that Baptism only effaces sin once, whilst through proper almsgiving we may obtain forgiveness as often as we like. Of course, to produce this beneficial effect it must be coupled with a sincere detestation of our sins and with the spirit of penance, and with sacramental confession if necessary. If we give alms and persevere in sin, the alms can obtain only a temporal blessing from God, but they may move the divine Mercy to show the giver the errors of his way and to lead him to repentance.

We must give alms from that which is our property, and not, of course, from the property of others, as it is unlawful to be charitable at the cost of justice. Return, first of all, that which you may possess unrighteously, and then give alms from your own if you can. If you cannot give alms have at least compassion for the needs of others. By treating the poor kindly you show them that you would gladly assist them if you had the means to do so.

Be on your guard not to allow the desire to be known as charitable to deprive you of the merit of almsgiving. Jesus Christ warns us not to sound a trumpet when we help the poor, but to give alms in secret, so that our left hand may not know what our right hand doeth (Matt. vi, 2, 3). If you seek only the praise of others, then all the merit of almsgiving ceases for you. Almsgiving cannot bring us spiritual profit if it does not proceed from the pure love of God, and the desire to assist our neighbor for the love of God.

Be charitable because the Lord so wills it; make use of this means in order to gain your salvation. Help the poor as much as lies in your power. Do not refuse to give alms whenever you possibly can, but do not seek therein the praise of men. Keep in mind that it is God who sends the poor to you, that you may help them; remember that in the person of the poor you are bestowing alms upon the Lord himself (Matt. xxv, 40), and that what you give to them is not of your, but of God's, creation.

In this manner you will render yourself worthy of the blessings of heaven for this as well as for the future life. Amen.

## L. Drunkenness

The inordinate gratification of the palate is not, as often supposed, an indifferent or unimportant matter. It was the first sin committed in the world, and is the source of all our misery, because the forbidden fruit partaken of by our first parents has transmitted its poison to all their descendants. Gluttony is even to-day the source of many sins on part of some Christians, who sacrifice their conscience, their religion, even their souls to it. Intemperance in drinking especially is a prevailing and dangerous over-gratification of the palate; therefore, let us consider the gravity of this vice in its various phases.

Drunkenness is the result of immoderate indulgence in intoxicating liquor, depriving persons of the use of reason, or at least considerably debilitating the same. Mark well these distinctions: the loss of reason, or considerably weakening the same.

There is complete drunkenness when a person, through the use of intoxicating drink, no longer knows what he says or does. It is beyond all doubt that this stage of drunkenness is a grievous sin against temperance, if it has been brought about by the will or consent of the drunken person.

This vice robs man of the greatest privilege which he possesses, it takes from him his dignity of manhood and relegates him to the ranks of the beast. What distinguishes him from the animal, if not the use of his reason? If this beautiful light is extinguished by intoxicants, what remains of man but the animal life? He sinks even below the animal, because he voluntarily forfeits, in addition to

reason, also the free use of his limbs, something that does not happen even to the most unclean of animals. What, therefore, can be more disgusting than this vice. It is, in fact, as St. John Chrysostom says, an ignominy and disgrace for the human race.

From the loss of the use of reason, combined with undue exposure to accidents, result many serious dangers. He may be in danger of death, through a misstep or fall induced by the immoderate indulgence of spirituous liquors, or through the quarreling to which drinking often leads. And how, under these circumstances, can he care for his soul when such condition renders impossible even a thought of salvation? This is a point well worth consideration. Any one else surprised by an unforeseen accident can, as long as he is conscious, turn to God and repent of his sins, or confess them if he has the opportunity. But the drunkard is absolutely incapable of doing so, his mind is buried and sodden in liquor. And is this not a grievous sin to expose one's self to the danger of dying like an unreasoning animal? Alas, many of these unfortunates are surprised by death in their drunkenness and fall thus into the hands of the living God.

Do not think, however, that in order to sin grievously it is necessary to get to this extreme state of intoxication. Even the state in which reason is not wholly obscured, but so much befogged and confused that a man could not make use of it to fulfil his religious duty or to protect himself from temptation may be grievously sinful.

This state is often called "exhilarated," an expression used by many to excuse their intemperance and to suppress the prickings of their conscience. But let us thoroughly understand that it is one thing to be jovial, and another to be half drunk. If all the trouble only consisted in partaking of enough liquor to make one spirited and jovial, without forgetting honor, respectability and Christian

obligations, then one might indeed call this state "exhilarated." But you cannot use this expression to describe the condition of one not far removed from total and senseless drunkenness. In this condition a man's reason is not completely obscured, but it is perceptibly changed. He is not wholly animal, but neither wholly human. Many shameful things are said and done in this state which the drunkard would not say or do in full possession of his reason, things which he afterward deplores, when the fumes of liquor have evaporated and he has returned to consciousness.

It is absolutely necessary for the drunkard to break away from his vice if he would save his soul. What bitter reproaches will a man address to himself, who, on account of this beastly passion of drunkenness, which even in this life makes him debased and contemptible, has ended by losing his immortal soul.

Intemperance is a great vice, it is the source of other grievous sins, and it is a habit most difficult to overcome. Yet with the grace of God, and a strong will, combined with faithful avoidance of occasions to sin by intemperance, many have been saved from this vice, and no one need despair who has the firm desire to reform. Amen.

## LI. The Sacrament of Penance

It was not enough for our most loving Saviour to institute the holy Sacrament of Baptism that we might be regenerated in grace, not enough to have communicated to us in holy Confirmation the Holy Ghost with his gifts. He did more, and, mercifully anticipating our imperfections and failings, provided a saving means which would reconciliate us to God if we strayed from the path of justice. He prepared for us in the holy Sacrament of Penance the salutary bath wherein we may cleanse our souls from personal sins.

What would, indeed, become of many of us if Jesus Christ had restricted the fruits of His redemption solely to the grace of Baptism and had not left us the means to regain this grace if once we lost it? The greater number of us, if not all, would be lost. How few Christians, indeed, there are who preserve their baptismal innocence! The sinner turns his back upon the Lord, making himself again the slave of Satan, thus meriting not God's mercy, but His justice. But O infinite mercy of God, in generous consideration of our frailty, the Lord ordained a remedy to restore the life of grace to those who after Baptism again surrender themselves to the slavery of sin. This great and wonderful means is the Sacrament of Penance, through which the fruits of the death of Christ are applied to those who have fallen after Baptism.

In order to understand perfectly the wonderful benefit of Sacramental Confession, and the love that Jesus Christ shows us in the same, we must thoroughly appreciate the malice of mortal sin. This sin is a direct offense against the exalted and omnipotent God, who

could annihilate the sinner at the very moment he is offending Him. This sin offends God in His very presence; indeed, at the very moment in which He is lavishing blessings upon the sinner. This sin deprives mankind of the grace and friendship of this most loving of Fathers, of all the merits of his former good works, and condemns him to the eternal torments of hell. In order to remove and obliterate this great evil of sin, all the merits and all the prayers of all the saints who have lived, or will live, upon earth, combined with the supplication of all the angels of heaven, would not avail, but for this the Son of God himself had to descend from heaven, shed His Blood and sacrifice His life.

It is beyond our understanding that God should endure with such great patience so great an evil, so boundless an offense, so great a wrong, without punishing it immediately. But the Lord not only bore patiently with His betrayer, He now bears with those who rebel against Him, and, more, He has given in the Sacrament of Holy Confession an easy, as well as efficient, means of admittance to pardon and reconciliation. By applying to us in this way the merits and the virtue of His Passion and death, the Lord renders satisfaction for us, remits our sins, and the punishment in part or in whole which they deserve.

The benefit of the Sacrament of Penance is all the more apparent, if we ponder the miraculous effects which it produces in those who receive it worthily.

First of all, it wipes out and takes away all sins, however large their number, however great their abomination. It suffices that the sinner, impelled by divine grace, sincerely repents of having offended God, that he make the firm resolution to sin no more, that he confess his sins humbly and sincerely, and that the priest pronounce the potent words, "I absolve thee from thy sins," and immediately God

forgives him all his misdeeds. Nay, more, God who just before was his enemy, becomes at once reconciled to the sinner, gives him back the merits of the good works that he had lost through his grievous sins, makes him again His son and beloved friend.

Truly sublime are these facts, and we are not able to fully conceive the effects that this Sacrament produces in the soul of those who receive it with proper preparation. And it not only effaces sin and restores to us sanctifying grace, but it is a most potent means to persevere in grace, and preserve ourselves from sin.

In this Sacrament Jesus Christ grants us the graces and means of assistance which maintains the soul in the state of justice, and strengthens and fortifies it against relapses. You will understand, then, how culpable are those Christians who neglect to avail themselves of this powerful weapon against their spiritual enemies. In the midst of all perils they may render themselves impervious to all temptations if they go frequently to holy Confession. But the devil, that relentless enemy of our salvation, uses all efforts and artifices to keep Christians away from this Sacrament.

It is an obvious fact that those who allow a long time to elapse between Confessions, are much exposed to the danger of becoming lax in the exercise of their religion. Christians, therefore, should go to Confession frequently for their own spiritual good, but also in gratitude to God, who in His mercy instituted this saving means. Let us make good use of this saving Sacrament by often approaching this fountain of grace so that we may remain faithful to God unto death, and finally attain the crown of glory that Jesus Christ has promised to those who persevere in righteousness unto the end. Amen.

## LII. Resignation to the Divine Will

The ignorance and concupiscence inherent in our nature are the effects of the sin of our first parents. Seduced by the insinuations of the arch enemy they dared to claim equality with the all-wise Creator, and in punishment for this presumption they lost for themselves, and for their posterity, the great measure of knowledge with which the Lord had furnished them when He created them, and they became a prey to ignorance, to deception and to error. As long as they lived in subjection to God their carnal desires were subordinated to the domination of reason, and thus they enjoyed perfect peace of mind. But when they transgressed the commandment of their Creator, their flesh began to rebel against the spirit, and there commenced that fierce struggle which ever since has been the punishment of mankind.

Blinded by ignorance and incited to sin by rebellious passions what may we do to escape perdition? We must ask the Lord to lead us upon the right path and to teach us to do His holy will. Hence Jesus Christ placed among the seven petitions of the Our Father the significant supplication "Thy will be done." This does not mean that our consent is required for the carrying out of God's will, but that we express our intention to do cheerfully the will of God, and we acknowledge that we cannot be saved unless we let our wills be in conformity with the Divine will.

Perfect resignation to the Supreme Divine will is most necessary for, and the most efficient means of, attaining to salvation, and it gives us even in the midst of adversity upon this earthly pilgrimage

a foretaste of everlasting bliss. This perfect resignation to the Divine will means that we will only that which is pleasing to God, and detest all that which displeases Him. So we know with certainty that it is the Lord's will that we should love Him above all things, that we keep holy the Sunday, that we honor our parents, that we forgive injuries, assist the needy, pray often, and do penance for our sins, for in Holy Scripture He has explicitly declared this to be His will. And God does not will, of this we are equally sure, that we take His name in vain, that we consent to unlawful desires or injure our neighbor, or yield to impurity. Therefore we must detest and flee all these things.

There are things, again, in which God's will is not known to us. We do not know whether God wills that our life be long or short, whether we are to live in wealth or poverty, enjoy good health or be burdened with sickness. In these things we must turn to Him and say from our hearts, with the converted Saul, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" and accept humbly and obediently His holy will, even if our own will and our own inclinations would lead us in a different direction.

Few are there, however, exclaims St. Bernard, who by denying their own wills seek to render themselves in all things comformable to the Divine will, by subjecting all inclinations of their hearts to the blessed will of God. The poor are dissatisfied because they are not rich, the sick complain of their sufferings, and it is indeed a rare occurrence to find one in adversity resigned to God's holy will. Hence a good many of us deserve the censure which our divine Lord passed upon the two sons of Zebedee, when their mother asked that one of them might sit upon His right hand and the other upon His left, in the kingdom of heaven, and the Lord said, "You know not what you ask" (Matt. xx, 22). "Cast all your solicitude upon

the Lord," admonishes St. Peter, "for he hath care of you" (Pet. v, 7).

This important truth was well appreciated by Heli, the high priest of the Old Law, when he received the news of the death of his sons, and of the lamentable fate that had overtaken his people. This saintly man preferred the Divine will to his own and exclaimed, "It is the Lord, let Him do what is good in His sight" (I. Kings iii, 18).

He who faithfully submits his will to the Lord's will, will even in this life live happily though in the midst of trials. According to St. Thomas it is absolutely certain that, since the Divine will is the first and universal cause of all things, this will must necessarily obtain in all things its effects and its aim. And as God accomplishes everything that He wills, so will those who live in perfect resignation to His divine will accomplish their own aim. As God is the essence of sanctity and the true source of virtue, He can will nothing but what is good; hence they who desire only what God wills can desire only what is good.

When pious Job lost all his fortune, and even his sons, he recognized the will of the Lord that was done in him, and instead of lamenting, he praised God. When covered from head to foot with sores, he declared that his joy was the greater the more he suffered, and that he would not cease to rejoice in the firm hope of God (Job xiii, 16) even if he should suffer death.

Dear brethren, it is for you, says the Holy Spirit, to choose according to your desire (Eccl. xv, 18). If you live in perfect resignation to the Divine will, then you will be certain of enjoying the eternal bliss of the elect in the next life. You will even in this life enjoy perfect peace and true happiness. Trials and contradictions will become for you the object of joy and consolation after the example of the holy Apostle, who says, "I am full of consolation and

full of overflowing delight in the midst of my afflictions" (II. Cor. vii, 4). If, on the contrary, you follow the dictations of your own will you will become the victim of error and of deception.

Let us, therefore, never deviate from the will of the Lord, for it is the path that leads to salvation, and whatever adversity may befall us, we shall receive the reward in this life, as well as in the next, that has been promised to those who do the will of God in all things (Matt. vii, 21). The Lord's will must in all our doings be our guide, for otherwise we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven, according to our Lord's own words. Let our example in our pious resignation to the Divine will be that childlike trust which is expressed in the words of little Samuel: "Speak Lord, for Thy servant heareth" (I. Kings iii, 10). Amen.

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